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Strictures on Methodism,
by a Careful Observer,
1804

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STRICTURES

ON

METHODISM.

BY A CAREFUL OBSERVER.

Multitudo non est certum veritatis indicium; saepe argumentum
pessimi turba: Veritatis discipulus non assentient in multitudine,
sed rationum pondere ducitur.

London:

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Crane Court, Fleet Street;

SOLD BY T. WILLIAMS, STATIONERS'-COURT, T. OSTELL, AVI-
MARIA-LANE, AND R. OGLE, GREAT TURNSTILE.

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PREFACE.

EVERY man who writes for the public naturally wishes to conciliate the esteem of his readers ; but whether I shall be so happy as to effect this purpose in all, is a question which I am not sanguine enough to answer in the affirmative.—The man who has never thoroughly weighed the importance of religion to the happiness of mankind, may wonder at the earnestness with which different parties of christians have contended for the truth of Revelation, and the necessity of believing its doctrines and obeying its precepts ; but he passes a rash judgment if he therefore conclude them either fools or enthusiasts. A little reflection must convince him that, to be zealous and sincere, where our highest interest is concerned, is true wisdom ; and that to pursue the greatest good of which our nature is capable, in the use of proper means, is the very reverse of enthusiasm.

The reader will find in the following pages some account of a people that have long been remark-

ably zealous in diffusing christian knowledge, and whose success in a work so beneficial to mankind has been truly astonishing. But it would be strange indeed, if, in the progress of my Review, which takes in the doctrines, discipline, and economy of Methodism, some faults and defects did not appear, on which a candid writer must animadvert. A taste for satire, however, will not be gratified by a perusal of this work; for though ridicule has been said to be the test of truth, I cannot think it will ever be employed with much advantage where religion is concerned. But neither have I studied to please such as are so illiberal as to confine nearly all excellence to their particular party: a close investigation of the subject has enabled me to discover what I conceive to be truth; and truth is seldom the language of panegyric. I have blamed and commended as conscience directed; and must leave to the public, which sooner or later decides justly, to determine what degree of credit and utility shall attach to my Strictures.

THE AUTHOR.

NOVEMBER 1, 1804.

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STRICTURES,

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SECTION I.

THE STATE OF RELIGION IN GREAT BRITAIN AND
IRELAND, PREVIOUS TO THE RISE OF METHODISM.

BY Methodism I mean the doctrines and economy of that large and growing body, late in connexion with the Rev. John Wesley. The pious clergy of the established Church, of which description there is a considerably large number, are styled Methodists; but neither they, nor the followers of the late Rev. George Whitfield, make any part of the subject of my Strictures.

Previous to the rise of Methodism, vital religion was little known in England; and the great mass of the people vied with each other in gross acts of immorality. The blessings of civil and

religious liberty were abused by the multitude to a shameful profligacy both of principle and practice. All being permitted to choose their religious opinions and modes of worship, the greater part, abusing that invaluable privilege, wholly neglected the means of public instruction; and, under the mildest and best civil government in the world, were as ignorant of the nature and design of christianity as if still enveloped in heathenish darkness. This general decay of true piety had its chief origin from the Act of Uniformity passed in the reign of Charles the Second, by which about two thousand conscientious ministers were cast out of the Church. These pious men were branded with the epithet Puritan, then odious, but now venerable; thus one generation vindicates those whom another oppresses. Several wise, learned, and good men, in and out of the Establishment, endeavoured to stem the general torrent of wickedness; but saw very little fruit of their labour. But that few of the clergy were either wise or pious in the days of Bishop Burnet, will appear evident from the following quotation. "Our Ember-weeks, said the good old prelate, are the burden and grief of my life. The much greater part of those who come to be ordained are ignorant to a degree, not to be apprehended by those who are not obliged to know it. Those who have read some few books, yet never seem to have read the Scriptures. Many cannot give a

tolerable account of the catechism itself, how short and plain soever. They cry, and think it a sad disgrace to be denied orders, though the ignorance of some is such, that in a well-regulated state of things, they would not appear knowing enough to be admitted to the holy sacrament."

The sermons of the established clergy, for many years previous to the origin of Methodism, were in general extremely sensible; but at the same time, in many respects, very unfit for teaching the first principles of the doctrine of Christ, without a competent knowledge of which a progress in piety is impracticable. It is a lamentable fact, which it would answer no good end to conceal, that the clergy themselves were in general destitute of true piety. The vices to which many of them were addicted, and the fashionable amusements in which they indulged, evince their unfitness to effect a reformation. The doctrines of justification by faith, and the witness and fruit of the Spirit, were nearly banished from the land; they were in general equally unknown to teachers and people. In their place was substituted an inconsistent system of morality, the chief ingredients of which were, 1st, we shall be saved if we do *all* the *good* we *can*; but 2dly, we are laid under a necessity of sinning daily, nor do we pretend that we might not have shunned many vices into which

we have fallen. How inadequate was such a system to rouse a careless people from their lethargy?

It is to be hoped that matters were not so bad in Scotland; and that many of the ministers in that country then did, and now do, preach the gospel. The regularity of the lives of the Scotch clergy, joined to the diligence with which they watch over their respective congregations, have a great and good effect on the morals of the people committed to their care. On account of these, and other causes connected with them, Methodism has made little progress in Scotland.

Previous to the introduction of Methodism into Ireland, the state of religion was highly deplorable. About three-fourths of the inhabitants of that island lie to the present in popish darkness, their priests are in general much addicted to drunkenness, and retain all the persecuting principles which have long disgraced the Romish Church, and rendered christianity odious to reasoning infidels. The established clergy in that country, were in general little better in point of morals than the popish priests. It is to be hoped that some of the Presbyterians still continued to live and preach the gospel: but the great body of that denomination were far from being moral; and evinced, by a too great fondness for disputation, that the

wisdom which is peaceable, as well as pure, occupied little of their attention.

Superstition among the Ignorant, and Infidelity among the Learned and Knowing, are generally the effects of an ignorant, dead, and profligate ministry. Superstition and infidelity were making a rapid progress, while those who should have lifted up their voice as a trumpet against them prophesied smooth things ; and such as ought to have been patterns to the flock were manifestly immoral.

What ordinary occurrence could stop the torrent of such extraordinary ignorance and impiety? The established clergy were in general bred to the ministry purely for the sake of temporalities. The seats of learning, so completely were " the foundations out of course," were noted for the profligacy of the students ; so that several who went to them novices in impiety, returned adepts. The custom of reading sermons, which had become universal among the established clergy, encouraged them in sloth and ignorance ; insomuch that some, not willing to undergo the fatigue of transcribing, have read to their audiences discourses from printed volumes. Such sermons were generally short essays on some points of morality ; and in point of excellence were often inferior to the Offices of Tully and the Morals of

Seneca. They contained nothing capable of rousing a careless auditory ; nor were they calculated to do so much as to fix the attention of the generality of the hearers. The authors of those sermons, in avoiding antinomianism, ran into another deadly extreme, in not teaching the people the necessity of trusting in the merits of Christ, as the procuring cause of their salvation. In shunning popery and enthusiasm, they left their discourses destitute of almost every sentiment which was calculated to promote self-denial and true devotion. That there were a few exceptions to whom the above censure does not apply, will be gladly admitted ; but as their preaching and example were confined to very narrow limits, no general reformation could be effected by their utmost exertions. The disease having become general and extraordinary, the usual methods of cure were inadequate to its removal ; and an extraordinary remedy became necessary. The whole head, with respect to the religious economy, was sick, and the whole heart faint : the glory of gospel preaching and christian experience had almost forsaken every denomination ; and Arianism and Socinianism, the *forerunners* of deism, if not *refinements* of it, were overspreading the land like a mighty torrent. In the midst of this almost universal dissolution of manners, and dereliction of gospel principle, Methodism made its appearance. Its progress and effects, advantages and

disadvantages, with every thing essential to its economy, shall come under review in the course of this work.

SECTION II.

THE PRINCIPAL CAUSES OF THE RAPID SPREAD OF METHODISM.

BEFORE the causes of the rapid progress of Methodism be brought forward, a few particulars relative to its founder, the Rev. John Wesley, will be found interesting to the intelligent reader. Early in life, after having read Kempis's Christian Pattern, Taylor's Rules for Holy Living and Dying, and Law's Christian Perfection, he resolved on the strictest regularity of life, and the most sincere devotion. The former of these works is perhaps, of all human compositions, best suited to promote deadness to the world, and universal holiness. For about the space of three hundred years it has been read with pleasure and profit by thousands of Protestants as well as Roman Catholics. Such is its excellence, that it is impossible without true devotion, to form any idea of its value. Taylor's Rules have been long, and still are, in high estimation by those, who can relish the most manly sense, and soundest divinity. Their admired author was in theology, what the

Honourable Robert Boyle was in philosophy ; the delight of his own, and admiration of after ages. Law's Christian Perfection contains many excellencies. He wrote it before he embraced the reveries of mysticism. It is mortifying to the pride of human reason to think that a man of Law's strength of intellect and acquired abilities, should so far set common sense at defiance, as to patronize the works of Jacob Behmen. Before he had drank very deeply at the muddy streams of mysticism, he was as an oracle to Mr. Wesley. But not being clear in the doctrine of justification by faith, instead of pointing him to Christ for a present salvation, he recommended increasing acts of mortification, and the most intense application to devotional exercises. Redemption in the blood of Christ, the forgiveness of sins, made no part of his system ; hence it was defective and uncomfortable. Teeming with a medley of religious opinions, chiefly collected from the three forementioned works, Mr. Wesley went a missionary to America. But what did he learn there ? What he least of all expected. " I went, said he, to America, to convert the Indians ; but who will convert myself ? " For several years after his return from America he formed no idea of becoming the Leader of a Sect ; but was from principle and inclination, resolved to continue in that Church, to the doctrines and liturgy of which he to the end of his life expressed the warmest attachment.

After being satisfied on the subject of his own experience, he preached with the zeal of a missionary, the pure doctrines of the gospel. His doing so caused him, without any ecclesiastical censure, to be excluded from all the churches in the metropolis. Seeing thousands perishing for lack of divine knowledge, and being prevented from preaching in places set apart for the purpose, he began to preach in the open air; and thousands, partly from the novelty of the thing, attended on his ministry. Nor did they attend in vain. His sermons, replete with pure divinity, and delivered with the warmth and simplicity of a divine ambassador, produced the best and most astonishing effects. Many, by their instrumentality, were "turned from the evil of their ways;" and became members of the Methodist society. The nature of this work prevents me from entering on historic facts any further than they are connected with my main design. Those who desire a faithful, well-authenticated narrative of Methodism, may be amply gratified by a perusal of Coke and Moore's Life of Mr. Wesley.

No reformer, however wise and pious, can possibly foresee the lengths to which he may be led, by a chain of events of which he is wholly unapprehensive. Luther, in reprobating the sale of indulgences, little thought that he was paving the way to his total separation from the Church of

Rome, and to the giving a blow to the Papal Hierarchy, from the effects of which it will never recover, till earth and heaven unite in crying, Babylon is fallen ! is fallen ! Mr. Wesley little imagined while faithfully preaching from church to church, and insisting that all in his new-formed society should be regular in their attendance on the church and sacrament, that his doing so was connected with his *future power* of receiving into his connexion some hundreds of preachers ; and of dismissing any, or all of them at pleasure. This is not the proper place for an examination of that power.

1. At the commencement of Methodism, the immoral lives of the clergy in general contributed much to its reception and rapid progress. Many of them had become the sport of immoral wits, and the disgrace of their profession. There are no people so lost to goodness, as to approve of immorality in the lives of men who are bound by the most sacred obligations to instruct others, both by precept and example. The populace never think deeply ; and hence are apt to draw from known premises absurd and contradictory conclusions. The lives of the clergy in general were too great a contrast to their sacred profession, to escape the attention of the most careless observers ; but how absurd were the inferences drawn by the multitude from such a

lamentable contrast? “*All* the clergy, said they, are alike; nor have they any higher end in view than valuable benefices: their tythes, not the souls of their parisoners, occupy their attention, and excite their solicitude.” From such a general censure, many of them proceeded to still more destructive inferences. Knowing the clergy to be in general a learned body, and concluding that of course they must be well acquainted with theology; they rashly inferred that these immoral divines could, from their superior knowledge, reconcile their conduct to a well-grounded hope of future happiness. When reproved for certain vices, the usual answer of the multitude was, “our clergy make no scruple to be found in such practices.” Seeing their spiritual guides, who ought to have *lived* and *preached* the *gospel*, mixing with the most dissipated company, and foremost at the silly and fashionable amusements of a giddy age; they, confounding the sacred office with the men who were its disgrace, proceeded to despise the office itself. From contemning the ministry of the word, a total non-attendance on divine worship was an easy transition; for who would be regular in his attention on any thing which, in his opinion, was of no estimation. This accounts for crowded Theatres, and almost empty Churches. Does it not follow, that the vices of the clergy rendered Methodism necessary, and contributed

much towards its propagation? Had those ministers of the establishment been as moral as the clergy of North Britain, and attended with equal care on the duties of their calling, Methodism, in all probability, would have prevailed as little in England as in Scotland. It is a prerogative of Infinite Wisdom to bring good out of evil: hence, under the influence of that wisdom, the immorality of pastors, and carelessness of hearers, with regard to any system of divinity, opened a way for a glorious revival of vital religion,

2. The wretched custom of reading, instead of preaching, sermons, which had become universal in the Church, contributed much to the non-attendance of the people, and consequently to the spread of Methodism. Reading well, which at best is incapable of producing effects equal to those which extempore speaking produces, was far from common among the clergy; nor were the discourses which they read in general adapted to popular audiences. It is not strange, that men, coldly reading even excellent compositions, in the effects of which they felt little interested, should produce an entire listlessness in their hearers. Nor is it surprising, that some of the most facetious among those merely reading divines, should, with unhappy Churchill, say,

With sacred dulness ever in my view,
Sleep, at my bidding, crept from pew to pew.

An address *merely* to the understanding, is far from being acceptable even to an intelligent audience ; what then must it be to an unread, illiterate congregation ? Where is the reader, however excellent and admired, who reads exactly as he speaks ? And were even this possible, (which we know is not) still, reading the most suitable and animated compositions would come far short of producing such effects as discourses, “ warm from the heart,” rarely fail to produce.

The custom of committing sermons to memory, and repeating them verbatim, though highly commended by some respectable writers, is seldom attended with any great and lasting effects. That mode of preaching is objectionable on the following accounts : it has *this disadvantage* of reading, that the repeater is confined to the very words of some written composition ; he must suspend the strong workings of reason and the passions, that the powers of his soul may concentrate the more in memory : all which is unfavourable to general knowledge. If any power of the mind should predominate over the rest, it ought to be the understanding, and not the memory. The powers of the soul were designed to act in union, and thereby tend to the perfection of the whole ; any one of them, therefore, usurping the place of another, tends to disorder and degradation. A *mere* repeater is an insignificant character. He

is a slave to words and phrases ; and who does not see that every species of slavery tends to debase ? A man of knowledge, unless deficient in courage, or defective in his organs of speech, finds suitable words flow with ease from his clear and well-regulated ideas. It follows, that repeating sermons has most of all the disadvantages of reading ; and if to these we join its suspending the reasoning powers, and degrading the imagination and affections, we shall not hesitate to give reading the preference.

3. The ignorance of the people in general contributed no little toward the progress of Methodism. At first sight this position surprises ; but when examined with candour it will appear evidently founded in truth. Knowledge, in itself an unspeakable blessing, frequently becomes injurious to its possessors by being abused, and connected with destructive errors. So far are genius and learning from preventing “damnable heresies,” that, in many instances, they contribute much towards their origin and propagation. Cicero, the first of Roman orators, and one of the wisest philosophers, declared that there never was an opinion so absurd as not to be patronised by some philosopher. Bishop Berkley, to whom Pope attributed “every virtue under heaven.” wrote a work professedly to prove the nonexistence of matter ; and the late Dr. Priestly, famed

for his moral and social virtues, imagined that, in one of his philosophic works, he demonstrated the nonexistence of spirit.—How much easier is it to prevail on a *savage* to become a genuine christian, than to persuade a *philosophic infidel* to admit the truth and certainty of christianity?—It is difficult, if not impossible, to *form* a complete theory of true religion without a suitable practice and experience; though after having having relinquished both, a man may still retain the theory. All systems of divinity which unconverted men either frame or adopt, are either defective in some points of the utmost moment, or mixed with dangerous, if not destructive errors. When people, previous to their hearing the gospel plan of salvation, have adopted a number of unscriptural notions, they have to unlearn their errors, in itself a difficult task, in addition to the business of acquainting themselves with “the first principles of the doctrine of Christ.” And if we admit that the mind cleaves as tenaciously to opinions long adopted and acted upon, as the organs of speech tend to a long-practised mode of pronunciation; we shall see the great advantage of not having to unlearn religious errors. With this advantage many of those who first became Methodists were favoured. Most of them, it is true, called themselves members of the established Church, though it was with truth said of them;

Wild as the untaught Indian's brood,
The Christian savages remain.

Their ignorance of polished life and elegant pronunciation, prevented them from being offended with the incorrect discourses, and vulgar pronunciation of many of those men whom the great Head of the Church made the instruments of their conversion. It is one of the advantages of unpolished life to attend less to the manner of what is said, than to the thing itself. For the above reasons, we may rank ignorance itself among the causes of the progress of Methodism.

4. Methodism owes much to extempore preaching. When I say extempore preaching, I would not be understood in an absolute sense, as if those who practised it chose their subject as well as words in the moment of delivery. Such preaching is an effect of genuine enthusiasm.

When Mess. Wesley and Whitfield ceased completely to use notes, their conduct was considered as very extraordinary; and when it was understood that they did not commit their sermons to memory, and that they were, notwithstanding, sensible and correct, those great men were looked upon as a sort of phenomenon, and consequently excited general admiration. However, the multitude, in part, accounted for their preaching extempore, by forming extravagant ideas of their learning: but when illiterate men, and common mechanics began to preach, to account for what was so uncommon, the mass of the wellmeaning

called in *extraordinary* inspiration. And indeed, without admitting this, in *some measure*, it will be difficult to account for the extemporary prayers and sermons of several, who were no way remarkable for strength of intellect, or acquired abilities. It does not appear from either scripture or reason, that God ever intended to confine extraordinary assistance to the first ages of christianity. That such assistance has sometimes been afforded, especially in the course of great revivals of religion, may be admitted, without danger of presumption; but that in general the extempore preaching of even the illiterate may be accounted for on other principles, is undeniable.—Without attributing all that sanctity to extempore sermons for which the ignorant contend, we may easily discern how, through the divine blessing, they have been eminently useful in the conversion of thousands in the Methodist community. The preachers, not being confined to a set of expressions, were at liberty to use their judgment, imagination, memory, and affections, as the various states and circumstances of their audiences demanded; and hence were capable of exciting such attention as the best readers would strive in vain to excite. Admitting that several of the first preachers were what the late Sheridan styled them, *wild orators*; yet they possessed all the *essentials* of oratory. They were good men,

thoroughly persuaded of the importance of the truths which they delivered; and "*in earnest.*" What though they fell into many grammatical errors, their congregations, who knew still less of these than themselves, were no way offended: but, taken up with the grand truths which they heard them deliver, were ready to exclaim, "these are the messengers of the living God, who come to shew us the way of salvation." With all the acknowledged defects of their discourses, they abounded with divine truth; and were delivered with a zeal of missionaries. The true, unaffected oratory of tears often accompanied their plain, scriptural sermons; and their effects were astonishing. Their frequent preaching, generally fourteen times in the week, to different congregations, so habituated them to extempore preaching, that in a short time they found it attended with little or no difficulty. It may be added, that some of them joined to unaffected piety and extempore preaching uncommon natural parts, with a considerable share of learning: among these, Mr. Thomas Walsh, a prodigy of biblical learning, was a distinguished character.

5. Itinerancy has had a share in the progress of Methodism. At first it was absolutely necessary, and it is still at least highly expedient. Like other human regulations it has, with all its advantages, its appropriate evils. Did I intend

this work for a panegyric, instead of an impartial review of Methodism, I should conceal the evils of itinerancy. One of these evils is a foolish curiosity of many Methodists, to hear what they account new and surprising. Hence several of them, accustomed to a variety and excellency of preaching, will leave their own chapels, and travel miles, to hear such as happen to be called popular preachers. This wandering humour is unfavourable to sober experience and christian practice. The attention which many of them expect from their preachers, before they can know either their names or places of abode, is another evil of itinerancy. Its last evil which strikes me is, that on account of it, some men, very defective in ministerial abilities, may live and die in the connexion. It may accidentally encourage sloth in some of the preachers, as it indulges them in preaching on the same subjects over and over, till they become "like a thrice told tale."

Having impartially considered the disadvantages of itinerancy, it is fair and candid to give an impartial view of its advantages. These may be considered, first, as they respect the people, and secondly, the preachers. By means of itinerancy, the people have the advantage of such various talents as tend much to their edification; and when they happen to have such preachers as are

not generally acceptable, they are, at the end of two years, sure to be delivered from that inconvenience. Curiosity, which to a certain point is innocent, is gratified by a frequent change of preachers : it is likewise favourable to large congregations.

In all religious bodies, merely tolerated, there is a continual verging towards too much power in the people, and consequently towards the destruction of discipline : for executive or legislative power, whether in civil or religious society, is never well managed when in the hands of many. Most Independent and Presbyterian ministers are divested of almost all authority in their respective congregations. They must act according to the wish and will of the acting members of their community, several of whom hold their stations in consequence of their wealth, not piety or parts, or be dismissed from, or deserted by, their hearers, and left without the means of subsistence ; unless, which is not generally the case, they possess an independent fortune. That great, good man, President Edwards, of New England, was insulted and dismissed by his unworthy congregation. It requires uncommon resolution, to declare the plain, unadulterated truths of the gospel, in the face of odium and poverty. Besides, ministers being stationary, are apt to form such intimacies with individuals as lead them to fear that

should they be *particular* in the application of their discourses, their addresses would appear so pointed and personal as to prevent them from producing a good effect.—Itinerancy cuts off most of these disadvantages, and leaves the preachers without a temptation to conceal or soften the harsh, but salutary truths, which they are called to deliver. Should their faithfulness, on any occasion, raise them enemies, the worst they have to apprehend from them is to be removed to another circuit at the end of their first year; and it sometimes happens that their premature removals are every way to their advantage. Their hopes of success, in addressing new audiences, tend much to encourage them, and produce exertion. Equally ignorant of their faults and excellencies, they declare the whole counsel of God, with stronger hopes of seeing the fruit of their labour among them, than if they had often strove in vain to turn them from the evil of their doings. The field of itinerancy being large, and several parts of it respectable, men of parts as well as piety engaged in it, rarely remain very long in obscurity. Knowledge is power, and if joined in Methodist preachers to deep piety, zeal, and an easy elocution, rarely fails to produce respectability in the connexion. The acquaintance with men and things, which travelling affords many opportunities of acquiring, is no trifling advantage. It appears, after fairly balancing the goods and evils of itine-

rancy, the former preponderate; and thus we may safely rank itinerancy among the causes of the progress of Methodism.

6. Persecution has had its great use in the spread of vital religion by the instrumentality of the Methodists. At first sight, it may appear strange that so bad a cause should contribute in any measure to the producing so good an effect. The persecution which the Methodists suffered was not in general of a legal nature. In a few instances the Conventicle Act, that disgrace to the British statute-book, was enforced against them with rigour. But they suffered considerably from the basest of the people, called mobs, sometimes encouraged by characters from whom better conduct might have been expected, and too often winked at by certain magistrates. The patience evinced both by the preachers and people greatly recommended to men of reason and candour the truths which they professed. It is foreign to the nature of this work, to enter into a detail of what they suffered; those who wish for information on that head may be amply gratified by a perusal of Mr. Wesley's Journals, a work equally calculated to please and instruct. The monstrous reports concerning the preachers, which were propagated through the land, induced numbers to hear and see for themselves. Thousands ran, in many places, to see and hear a Methodist preacher with

as much avidity as to a favourite amusement. They were astonished to hear the men of whom they had heard all manner of evil, speak the words of truth and soberness. They listened, looked at each other, and were confounded. Many who came to hear through mere curiosity went away thoughtful; began to read and pray, and soon experienced the power of vital religion. Of persecutors themselves some became sincere converts.

Persecution, to a certain point, is favourable to any zealous, religious body; but it may be carried to *such a length* as to prove destructive. We have proofs of this in the extirpation of protestantism from several popish countries. Had Methodism, when it began with Mr. Wesley and a few other clergymen at Oxford, been legally persecuted, and its propagators either banished, or condemned to perpetual imprisonment, such persecution could not have failed to prevent the growth of the Methodist body. But calling them sacramentarians, the holy club, and other names expressive of odium, tended only to enflame their zeal, and unite them closer to each other. The many virulent attacks made on the Methodists from the press, time after time, were repelled with much judgment, force, and astonishing effect by their admirable Founder. His skill in logic was proverbial. His Appeals were read by thousands, who, in spite of their prejudices against

him, were forced to own that he had the advantage of his opponents. The late attacks from the press on the Methodists by intolerant men have done them no injury. There have not been wanting some, even since the commencement of the nineteenth century, who have contended earnestly for the interference of the Legislature in order to stop the progress of Methodism. The Sunday schools, generally in the hands of the Methodists, (an institution which does honour to human nature,) have been represented, by the enemies of toleration, as seminaries for the purpose of instilling into the minds of the lowest order, the principles of infidelity and rebellion. Such a calumny is too gross to be honoured with a confutation ; it is enough to say, it is an abominable falsehood.

SECTION III.

THE UTILITY OF AN ESTABLISHED CHURCH.—THE
METHODISTS ACTED WISELY IN NOT SEPARATING
FROM THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

THE common objection made against a church establishment is, that it corrupts christianity, and is consequently opposed to the interests of true religion. But an impartial review of the state of christianity during the three

first centuries will satisfy all the unprejudiced, that egregious errors in doctrine, and great degeneracy of manners, were found among christians before any civil government in the world could be blamed for their existence.—The Gnostics arose in the apostolic age; formed separate assemblies; and opposed some of the most essential truths of the gospel. They were a licentious people both in principle and practice. Several of them did not scruple to assert that there existed no moral difference in human actions.

In the second century great disputes arose concerning the Paschal Feast, and Easter. Victor, bishop of Rome; attempted to force the Asiatic christians to follow the rule observed by the Western christians. On their refusal to accede to his demand, he broke communion with them, and pronounced them unworthy of the name of brethren. The Elionites believed that Christ, though divinely sent, was the son of Joseph and Mary, according to the ordinary course of nature. Saturnius of Antioch held the doctrine of two principles from whence, he supposed, all things proceeded; the one a wise and benevolent Deity; and the other *Matter*, a principle essentially evil, acting under the superintendence of a malignant intelligence. Many became converts to his extravagant opinions. Iatian, an Assyrian, famous

for his genius and learning, as well as the austerity of his life and manners, looked on matter as the fountain of all evil; and distinguished the Creator of the world from the Supreme Being. Carpocrates, by birth an Alexandrian, asserted that Christ was distinguished from other men by nothing but his superior fortitude and greatness of soul. He recommended to his followers a vicious course of life; and declared that eternal salvation could be obtained by those only who had committed all sorts of crimes, and filled up the measure of their iniquity.

In the third century the bishops assumed, in many places, a princely authority; and appropriated to their evangelical function the splendid ensigns of temporal majesty. The Presbyters abandoned themselves to luxury and indolence; in the middle of this century the main body of the christians were as profligate in their manners as the heathens themselves. From this summary of Church history, it is evident that the Church was greatly corrupted before it became the religion of the State. And if christians in general became so corrupt both in doctrines and morals when frequently persecuted, it is more than probable, that had they enjoyed unlimited toleration, they would, in the course of time, have become as erroneous in their doctrines and immoral in their lives as they became after their religion was engrafted on

the state. The circumstance of its union with the Civil Power was no necessary cause of its corruption. Indeed it had been greatly corrupted before that event; and was fast verging to still greater degeneracy. After all that has been asserted to the contrary by Theorists and violent Sectaries, its being protected and favoured by civil government has been attended with many advantages. Among these the learned and liberal education of the clergy holds a distinguishing place. Superficial and ignorant observers cannot conceive how closely the cultivation of literature is connected with the interests of true religion. The extirpation of idolatry, which, being of satan, can never long continue without the support of the civil power, greatly tended to the spread of christianity. Crimes highly disgraceful to human nature, but committed without a blush by heathens, and sung in harmonious numbers by their poets, are capitally punished in most, if not all christian countries. The christian world owes its preeminence in useful and ornamental literature, and its general freedom from slavery, to that religion which "minute philosophers" affect to treat with contempt. Could these valuable ends have been so well effected, or in many cases at all effected, had Pagans still continued lawgivers and supreme magistrates? Even the Church of Rome, the peculiar tenets of which I

sincerely disapprove, and the persecuting spirit and practice of which I would hold up to universal execration, did much in civilizing the world, and spreading the essential truths of christianity. It can justly boast of its learned men and eminent saints. Kempis, Pascal, Derenty, and Fenelon would have done honour to the first age of christianity. We may, without any stretch of charity, reasonably conclude that many others, whose parts and piety did honour to human nature, lived and died in the Romish communion. Though the compilers of the articles of the Church of England, in their zeal for reformation, pronounced decisively that the Church of Rome had erred in matters of faith, few well-informed protestants now follow their example. With all its acknowledged corruptions, and it has many, the mild, pious, and learned Melancthon was far from rash in breaking from its pale. These sentiments will, I know, expose me to the censure of half-thinking protestants, who, uncharitably propounding all papists idolaters, consign them over to the prince of darkness. Though a protestant from conviction as well as education, I reprobate such an unscriptural and cruel censure.

Abundantly more can be said in favour of the English Church Establishment. Its government by bishops, if well managed, would greatly promote the interests of true religion. Brighter or-

naments of learning and religion never graced the world than several English prelates. Not to mention those who, at the dawn of the reformation, with apostolic intrepidity, “suffered the loss of all things;” who does not admire the piety, zeal, and heavenly-mindedness of Abp. Leighton? Tillotson will be long remembered for his candour, true goodness of heart, tolerating spirit, and useful writings. His numerous sermons are remarkable for good sense, luminous order, sober and wise investigation, pure, and in general correct style, and sound divinity. Burnet, a man of serious piety, and multifarious learning, reading, and knowledge, did honour to the mitre. Usher was renowned through the world for his learning, mildness, and piety; and Bedell was eminent for every grace which should adorn a christian bishop, and lived and died a model for all his successors in the episcopal office. And who knows how many of the present English and Irish bishops will be the admiration of future ages?—Happy should I be to be able to record with truth, that the character of the present dignitaries and inferior clergy in general bore any thing like a near resemblance to the true, though imperfect sketch I have drawn of a few celebrated characters. The contrast between them is too obvious to escape observation. ; But still, that Church which has produced so many of the most amiable and excellent clergymen, and which still

can boast of many, who by their learning, labours, and piety do honour to the profession; that Church, I say, should be treated with great respect and veneration. The generous manner in which it treated, and still treats the Methodists, distinguishes it, for candour and liberality, from all other established churches. The Methodists are permitted to enjoy all the privileges which appertain to it, while at the same time they have the full advantage of the ministry of their own preachers, and of the discipline peculiar to them as a religious body. They are considered as a sort of semi-dissenters, with whom the Church, from religious and political motives, is willing to coalesce. Their venerable Founder, a short time before his death, avowed to the world that he had lived, and would die a minister of the Church of England. His having acted a little before as if he was of a contrary mind may be attributed to the weakness and mistakes inseparable from humanity. Candour, from a view of his whole life, will attribute his inconsistency to the undue influence of friends, or any other cause, rather than impeach, in the smallest degree, his piety and veracity.

It seems that the strict discipline for which some contend, and which has its great use in religious societies, is incompatible with a Church Establishment, which from its nature, must em-

brace the great mass of the people. What would morality and religion gain by the formal excommunication of all the immoral characters who still consider themselves members of the established Church? Surely nothing. Nay, they would suffer considerably; for, excluded from all church fellowship, such characters, viewed in the light of heathens, would throw off all restraint; and, bad as they are, become abundantly worse. With all the acknowledged and much to be lamented ignorance of theoretic and practical religion under which the generality of the members of the established Church labour, there is sufficient reason to believe that they are no worse than the bulk of christians were in the third century, though at that time the civil power could not be accused of corrupting christianity.

The established Church of this country, considered in a civil and religious point of view, is unquestionably attended with many advantages. Its clergy in general are learned, and men of better morals than most in the higher walks of life. I am happy to add, from the best information, that a considerable number are truly devout and laborious in the discharge of the sacred duties of their profession. Such of them as are of a contrary description; of which, alas! there are too many, are obliged, notwithstanding, to read that excellent formulary, the liturgy, every Lord's day; and ad-

minister the sacraments by the use of forms highly unexceptionable. Their insensibility to divine things can in no measure affect the worthy communicants. What has been offered on this head is a sufficient vindication of the conduct of the Methodists in continuing as a body united to the established Church. Their attachment to it has often and long exposed them to the censure of violent sectaries. Were their partial separation from the Church yet to be taken, they would reject every offer to that purpose ; and I am warranted in saying, that could they, without a serious division, return to their original plan, it would give the great body of them, as well preachers as people, the sincerest pleasure.

In Ireland where, considering that three-fourths of the population are papists, Methodism is extremely prevalent : its adherents continue in the strictest union with the Church. The clergy there in general treat them with affection ; and frequently attend preaching in their chapels. In Dublin several of the nobility attend an annual charity sermon in Whitefriar-street ; and possessing the true dignity and politeness which reflect honour on rank, do not think themselves degraded by taking upon them the office of collectors on such occasions. Such christian and conciliating conduct has been, and still is, conducive to the best interests of the Church of Ireland. Did the

Methodists desert it, which I trust they never will, by doing so, they would "not enrich themselves," though they would "make it poor indeed."

But notwithstanding all I have urged in favour of the Church Establishment of this country, I would not be understood to give the smallest countenance to persecution; or to pronounce them either heretics or schismatics who, from the best views they can form on the subject, think it their duty to dissent. So to pronounce would be to imitate the Church of Rome in one of its worst decisions, viz. that out of its pale there is no salvation. Though a warm friend to the established Church, I abhor such an uncharitable and sweeping censure.—Such creatures are men in the present state, that they often abuse the choicest gifts of Heaven, reason and moral agency; yet their abuse of them does not provoke the Moral Governor of the Universe to make men irrational and necessary agents. Civil liberty, even under the wise and energetic government of this country is often the innocent cause of licentiousness. Yet who that knows the value of civil liberty would be deprived of it in order to be freed from its appropriate evils? Those evils, greatly to be lamented, are, notwithstanding, when compared to the goods of civil liberty, as the small dust upon the balance. Religious liberty, an invaluable blessing,

has been, and will be abused, by men of strong passions and warm imaginations; and the effects of such abuse will be a portion of fanaticism and enthusiasm. Yet where is the man who thinks for himself, in a manner becoming a rational being, who would not prefer religious liberty, with all its ills, to that tyranny over conscience which is implied in forced conformity. Papists, as they profess infallibility, and declare salvation impossible out of their church, are *consistent*, though *wicked*, in their persecution of dissenters. But as protestants found their own dissent from the Romish church on the unalienable right of private judgment, and, disavowing infallibility, assert the right of thinking for themselves; their domineering over the consciences of any, whether papists or protestants, can never be vindicated from the charge of the most glaring *inconsistency*.

SECTION IV.

THE VIEWS, CONDUCT, AND DOCTRINES, OF THE FIRST METHODISTS.

THE first Methodists, as a body, with their Founder at their head, were entirely averse to every thing which they conceived tended to a separation from the Church of England. Sectarianism was as much their aversion as rebellion. They

called themselves a Society, not a Church; and when they found some dissenters desirous of becoming members, they advised them to attend the respective ministries to which they had been accustomed. *No exception* was then made to the rule enjoining attendance at church and sacrament, on account of the lives or doctrines of the clergy, however immoral the former, or heterodox the latter. In opposition to seceders, who laid the foundation of their body, by shewing how fallen the church was, the first Methodists laid the foundation of theirs, by shewing how fallen they were themselves. Their intentions were pure; their lives upright; and their zeal such as would have done honour to the purest ages of christianity. Their end was to spread scriptural religion, the love of God and man, throughout Great Britain and Ireland, independent of party; and it was one of their points of glorying, that any sincere christians, notwithstanding difference of opinion and modes of worship, might make a part of their community. And here, it is but justice to add, that whatever innovations Methodism has undergone, that part of glorying still continues.

The gravity, self-denial, piety, zeal, and unbounded benevolence of Mr. Wesley and his first associates at the rise of Methodism, could not fail to excite general attention. After supplying them-

selves with necessaries, they sacredly devoted the remainder of their income to charitable uses. Beneficence, to which even the ungenerous are obliged to pay the tribute of respect, marked their steps among the children of affliction and poverty. The blessing of many that were ready to perish came upon them ; and many a widow's heart did they cause to sing for joy.

Their doctrines were strictly protestant and evangelical ; differing in no essential point from those of the Church of England. The points on which they most frequently and earnestly insisted were, original depravity ; the misery and danger of those who are not justified ; justification by faith alone ; good works springing from a living faith ; and universal holiness. In vindication of the first of these doctrines, Mr. Wesley in answer to Dr. Taylor of Norwich, published one of his ablest performances. In it, from matter of fact, in conjunction with scripture, and the testimonies of heathens, he demonstrated “ man by nature far gone from original righteousness ;” and that whatever moral good is found in him should be attributed to grace, not nature. His love of souls led him to paint in strong colours the miseries of the unconverted ; and his associates in the ministerial work followed his example. That they sometimes so preached man's fall as to lose view of his moral agency, should not be concealed ; but whenever

this happened, through a happy inconsistency, they exhorted *all immediately* to turn to God : and with the energy of men who felt eternity near, they were ready to take heaven and earth to witness that they were clear from the blood of all men. Thus were they *practically* right even when, as they afterwards confessed, they leaned too much to Calvinism. The doctrine of the “knowledge of salvation, by the remission of sins,” on which they earnestly and often insisted, was warmly opposed by many. For any to profess themselves conscious of being in the favour of God, or as it was more usually expressed, know their sins forgiven, was counted by thousands the height of presumption, or the effect of fanaticism. Those who maintained that such a knowledge was the common privilege of all “who truly repent and unfeignedly believe the holy gospel,” founded that opinion, then so novel, on their views of scripture and reason. The following is a short abstract of their reasonings on this head : St. Paul, in the eighth of the Romans says, “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirits that we are the children of God.” However this testimony be defined, it is decisive to those who enjoy it ; the point it determines is, that they are adopted children of God, and partakers of the Divine nature. But should any reject all we say on the witness of the Spirit, we call their attention to the fruit of it as described in the Epistle to the Galatians. To

mention no more of the fruit, or graces of the Spirit there noticed, than love, joy, peace; can we have these and be ignorant of their being in our possession. We are, from the laws of our nature, as conscious of the workings of the passion of love, whoever, or whatever is the object of it, as of the workings of grief or fear. Who does not know when he is sorry? Or when he is afraid? And who would not be offended if asked do you know, or are you certain, that you love your friend?—If we love God at all, we love him supremely; and hence, conscious of our doing so, can with absolute certainty say, “We love him because he first loved us.” True religion, being a divine science, is founded in immutable truth and certainty.—Christians are engaged in a great work, that of their salvation; but are moral distinctions so blended, that they (christians) cannot with *certainty* distinguish between the work which God gives them to do, and the drudgery of sin in which satan would have them engaged? The life of christians is compared to running a race; and can a race be run in ignorance? To wrestling, another famous Olympic game, their life is likened; and does not this imply that they know themselves to be engaged in such a laborious and skilful exercise? They are compared to soldiers; are called to put on them the whole armour of God, and to quit themselves like men; and does not this imply that they know that Christ is

the captain of their salvation, and that they are fighting under his banner, and not under that of the prince of darkness? They have Jehovah for their king, and are of course subjects of his government; a government infinitely wise in its laws and administration; and consequently such as prevents its obedient subjects from labouring under the painful suspicion of their being rebels. There is not on earth an established tyranny so cruel as to render its subjects in general incapable of knowing whether they have ground to expect protection from it or capital punishment. And is it not blasphemy to represent the Divine government as more cruel and absurd than the worst of human tyrannies? Hence, say the Methodists, reason, common sense, and the nature of government, conspire with the sacred oracles to prove, that the christian's hope is highly reasonable, and that it can, from certain first principles of morals and religion, be proved not only highly probable, but absolutely certain. That this highly rational and scriptural doctrine has been abused by weak-minded enthusiasts and deceitful hypocrites will be readily admitted; but it should not, on that, or any other account, be relinquished. If we give up every thing that has been abused, what shall we retain? Surely not reason and moral agency, the christian sabbath, nor the scriptures themselves; for these choice gifts of Heaven have been often, and still are abused by millions.

The doctrine of christian perfection was for a time preached too unguardedly by Mr. Wesley and his assistants. This he afterwards acknowledged and avowed to the world. But as I shall take this subject up, and handle it at some length in a subsequent part of this work, I shall only make a few cursory remarks upon it at present. That doctrine, of all others, has been most abused in the Methodist connexion. Novices both in sense and religion have but too often professed entire sanctification, and considering themselves a peculiar description of believers, were ready to say to those from whom it would have become them to learn to be sober-minded, stand off for I am holier than you ! How many ill-natured, conceited, censorious professors of perfect holiness has this age produced ? They are in general, of all others, the most ungovernable ; and of course give most trouble to their preachers.

SECTION V.

THE GENERAL CHARACTER OF THE FIRST METHODIST PREACHERS, WITH SOME ACCOUNT OF THEIR SUCCESS.

WHEN we include Mr. John Wesley, his brother Mr. Charles Wesley, and Mr. Whitfield among the first Methodist preachers, the respectability of that body will be obvious to every

judicious observer. These were men of good natural parts, improved by a learned education. From the accounts transmitted to us of what are called the first lay preachers, we may conclude with certainty, that they were in general deeply pious and eminently zealous. Some of them were respectable for natural and acquired abilities. But the most distinguishing, as well as best traits in their character were unaffected piety, seriousness, industry, and a burning zeal for the honour of God and the salvation of mankind. Those who would have a faithful epitome of the lives of the first Methodist preachers I refer to Atmore's Memorial, a work highly interesting to the lovers of genuine biography. The author, with immense labour, has compressed in one octavo volume a sketch of the lives of about two hundred preachers. It is, in short, a work calculated to snatch from oblivion a number of characters which deserve to "be had in everlasting remembrance."—Atmore does not magnify, with some, the parts and piety of the first Methodist preachers at the expence of their successors. He discovers that ample justice may be done to the parts and piety of the former, without any invidious reflections on the latter. His work is not disgraced by the smallest tinge of misanthropy.

That some of the first race of preachers disgraced their profession by immorality must be

acknowledged. But as recording their names in a work of this nature would answer no valuable purpose ; and as they are not alive to plead their own cause, nor extenuate their guilt, "nameless in dark oblivion let them dwell." The badness of their character reflects no more disgrace on the body with which they were connected, than Judas' treason does on his eleven apostolic brethren.

The success of the first Methodist preachers was truly astonishing. Thousands were savingly converted by their instrumentality. Every where finding the people in general ignorant, careless, and immoral, they preached repentance towards God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is but candid to acknowledge that several of them knew little more ; not having time or opportunity for the study of systematic divinity. But even this acknowledged defect was overruled by Infinite Wisdom for the advancement of vital religion. Awakening sermons were absolutely necessary ; and who so likely to preach them constantly as those who could preach little beside ? The simplicity of their manner, and in many cases, vulgarity of their style, rendered them better understood by the people to whom they were especially sent, namely the poor, than they would have been had they possessed what some reckon essential requisites for the ministry. I mention this as a matter of fact, and a proof of the divine wisdom,

which can, and often does work by instruments which men would reject as unsuitable; but do not in any measure mean it as a satire on knowledge and learning, nor an eulogium on ignorance. To learning and learned men, civil and religious society are under the greatest obligations. But to return from this short digression: Numbers who attended on the ministry of the first Methodist preachers were not in the habit of attending public worship of any sort; and were consequently ignorant of the form as well as of the power of godliness. Others were sincerely attached to the established Church, though unacquainted with its doctrines. Some of these were endeavouring to serve God according to the best light they enjoyed; but being in general ignorant of the nature of christian experience, they were very unhappy. Several of this description, on hearing the Methodist preachers explain the doctrines of repentance, faith, pardon, and holiness, embraced those doctrines with eagerness and affection; and, joining themselves to a people then "scattered and peeled," and a proverb of reproach, were willing to suffer the sneer of infidels, the contempt of the great, and the gross calumnies of the savage multitude. The preachers regularly attending the Church service, and frequently quoting passages from its liturgy, homilies, and articles in support of the doctrines which they advanced, greatly

tended to remove prejudice from the minds of their hearers. Many of these were grossly ignorant, and notoriously wicked, especially at Kingswood, several parts of Cornwall, Walsingham, Wednesbury, and Bolton in Lancashire. The sudden and lasting change wrought in numbers of the inhabitants of those and other parts of the kingdom, and fully evinced by "the fruit of good living," is a demonstrable matter of fact; a fact which can be accounted for on no principle short of that *ordinary* inspiration for which the established Church directs its members to pray. "Let us beseech him to grant us true repentance, and his holy Spirit, that the rest of our life hereafter may be pure and holy." This well-known, sober, and remarkable sentence contains in substance an account of all the inspiration for which the Methodists as a body ever contended. I say as a body; for individuals have been found among them who pretended to have received spiritual gifts of an extraordinary nature. Among these George Bell and his nonsensical admirers were most conspicuous. He had been, it seems, for a time, truly religious; but, his judgment being weak, he gave way to strong passions and a warm imagination, and hence fell into reveries highly disgraceful and ridiculous. His fixing the time for the world to have an end demonstrated the height of fanaticism. And his saying, on his prophecy turning out false, that if he was deceived, the Lord had deceived

him, proved something worse than fanaticism itself. The truth is, that if the progress of Methodism could have been stopped by scandals there was a sufficiency for that purpose. Offences of various kinds, in every denomination, are the natural result of men's living in the present state of ignorance and imperfection. But in spite of scandals from within, and opposition from without, Methodism has prospered to the admiration of the religious and philosophic world. Its avowed and secret enemies are ignorant of its excellencies; and its too partial friends will scarcely own that it is accompanied with even *accidental* evils. Truth holds a medium; and while it rejoices in all the good done by the instrumentality of Methodism, is not blind to the faults which disgrace some of its professors. A professed panegyrist of the Methodists, if he possessed any love for truth, or his own character, would not represent them as a *perfect people*; much less should the author of these Strictures, whose sincere desire and aim is to be impartial. While individuals among them, and some of them such as make the largest profession, disgrace religious society by indulging in evil-speaking, talebearing, and censoriousness, the body in general are truly pious, and of course, strictly moral. In fine, flattery and satire apart, the first Methodist preachers saw much fruit of their labours, and thousands, who are now their companions in glory, were on

earth the seal of their apostleship. The few preachers yet living who saw Methodism in its infancy do honour to the cause in which they have been so long and so successfully engaged. Almost all the companions of their youthful labours have made "their escape from the windy storm and tempest." For the honour of human nature, and the good of mankind, it is "devoutly to be wished," that those who have entered on their labours may copy their good example, that after having, in imitation of them, "turned many to righteousness," they may "shine as the stars for ever and ever."

SECTION VI.

MESS. WESLEY AND WHITFIELD DIFFERED IN JUDGMENT CONCERNING GENERAL AND PARTICULAR REDEMPTION—THEY SEPARATED FROM EACH OTHER—THE CONSEQUENCES OF THEIR SEPARATION.

AT an early period of Methodism Mr. Whitfield embraced the doctrine of Calvinism; or, what some think they term more inoffensively, the doctrine of particular redemption. That numbers justly famed for parts and piety have embraced and vindicated the peculiar tenets of Calvin, is a truth to which the candid patrons and friends of general redemption subscribe without hesitation. Among those eminent characters Mr. Whitfield

holds a distinguished place. His preaching powers were proverbially great. He could on proper occasions be a son either of thunder or consolation. His deep piety, fervent zeal, great faithfulness in the ministerial work, and to crown all, his great success, prove that he was a choice instrument raised up by Divine Providence for the purpose of reviving and spreading vital religion. That Mr. Wesley was sorry to be separated from so able a fellow-labourer is unquestionable; and that he did all in his power to prevent so unpleasing a circumstance, the most authentic documents might be cited to prove. He made every concession favourable to Calvinism, which he possibly could, consistent with his views of the subject; and wished the union between him and Mr. Whitfield to continue notwithstanding their acknowledged difference of opinion on the points in dispute. On both sides some warm expressions were used; and each, firmly adhering to his peculiar sentiments, a separation became inevitable. One consequence of this breach was a distinction of the Methodists into Calvinistic and Arminian; a distinction which still exists.

That so early a division of the Methodist body was attended with serious evils, it would be wrong to dispute. By it several of the weak were offended; the good and wise grieved; and the enemies of reformation gratified. It afforded

matter for the ridicule of profane infidels, and silly triflers; and spread dismay among pious souls, who had often taken sweet counsel together, but had by it their outward union broken, and their wonted mutual help prevented. How many that division tended to harden, eternity will discover.

Unhappy, inconsistent man, ever liable to err, is greatly prone to bring evil out of good; but it is the prerogative of Infinite Wisdom to bring good out of evil. The principal good, consequent on the separation of Mess. Wesley and Whitfield, may be comprised in two particulars. First, their shewing to the world, that mutual love and genuine piety are very compatible with difference of opinion: and secondly, Mr. Whitfield's Calvinism opening his way for preaching the gospel successfully among the Scotch Presbyterians and American Independents.

Men destitute of genuine piety, being unacquainted with the generosity and forbearance with which it is always accompanied, are apt to imagine that those who contend in the religious world mutually hate each other. It is to be lamented, that the severity with which religious controversy has been often maintained, has favoured the world with but too many plausible arguments for such an opinion. And it would

be uncandid to conceal, that the forementioned division of the Methodists gave rise eventually to a controversy on the Five Points, which was conducted, by several who entered into it, with more warmth, asperity, and personal abuse than became the disciples of a Master who teaches to be meek and lowly. Some of the publications on the Calvinistic side abounded with such scurrillity and personal abuse as did no honour to their authors, nor the cause they were designed to support. One, who had been among the most uncivil of those sticklers for Calvinism, is still alive; and notwithstanding his eccentricities respectable on many accounts. Without the talents of Mr. Toplady, he seemed to rival, if not surpass him in low abuse. Mr. Thomas Oliver, and the Rev. Walter Sellon were the severest writers on the Arminian side; but although several of their expressions were too harsh, they might be considered courteous writers when compared to the most furious of their opponents. In this famous controversy the Rev. J. Fletcher, vicar of Madely, engaged. Such was the peaceableness of his disposition, and love to all the truly pious, by whatever names or opinions distinguished, that nothing short of a sense of what he conceived his duty could possibly have engaged him in the contest. And when he engaged in it, he was far from calling to his assistance the destructive auxiliaries of in-

vective and personal abuse. He paid great respect to the parts and piety of his opponents ; and even went so far as to hope, that some of those who wrote and preached against his views of christian perfection, were so happily inconsistent as to enjoy that great blessing for which he contended. He strove in vain for an outward reconciliation of the contending parties. His writings are an excellent model for christian controversy, and his holy life, faithful labours, and triumphant death, a transcript of the sacred truths which he so ably vindicated from the pulpit and the press. His love to his opponents he discovered by the most unequivocal proofs ; and he reckoned some Calvinists among the choicest of his christian friends. What true christian friendship subsisted between him and the Mess. Thornton and Ireland ! And how cordially did Mess. Whitfield and Wesley love each other, even after their separation ? What an admirable character did Mr. Wesley draw of Mr. Whitfield in his funeral sermon ?— Calvinists and Arminians now love as brethren ; study to promote each others happiness ; agree to lay controversy in general aside, and to dwell most on the grand truths of the gospel on which they are all agreed. By acting so rational and christian a part they deprive the infidel of his favourite argument, if such it may be called, that all different denominations of christians anathematize each other.

Calvinism being the orthodoxy in general of the inhabitants of Scotland, and their having considered Arminianism as little short of a "damnable heresy," would have, in a great measure, prevented Mr. Whitfield's usefulness in that country had he embraced the doctrine of general redemption. But being a Calvinist in sentiment, thousands heard him without prejudice, and received profit from his ministry. His peculiar tenets recommended him likewise to the dissenters of different denominations in America which were Calvinistically disposed. There thousands on thousands attended his ministry, to whom he faithfully preached repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Losing view of the knotty points of controversy, he preached the gospel in its purity to applauding and profited thousands, who would never have heard him, had it not been for his Calvinism. Thus, the *evil* of the early division of the Methodists has been, in the hands of Infinite Wisdom, instrumental of great good by the enlargement of Christ's kingdom.

SECTION VII.

MR. WESLEY'S POWER DISPUTED—ON WHAT GROUNDS
IT WAS DEFENSIBLE.

THE power possessed and exercised by Mr. Wesley over the Methodist body, as well preach-

ers as people, was very extensive ; nor was there any appeal from his decision. By his sole authority he could receive preachers into his connexion, appoint their stations, and dismiss them at pleasure. The inferior officers, such as local preachers, leaders, and stewards, were equally subject to his direction and authority. This power which, *abstractedly considered*, seems scarcely defensible on protestant principles, gave great offence to some of the preachers. Arguing from their call to, and their success in the ministry, they pleaded for deciding every matter belonging to the Methodist body, in full Conference, by a simple majority. No doubt, they urged many plausible arguments in favour of their possessing the power which they claimed ; a power which would have reduced their Founder to a level with themselves. He wisely pleaded, that the power he possessed came to him unsought, in the order of Providence ; that it was in its exercise attended with great difficulties ; but, satisfied that it was a talent, for the use of which he was accountable to the great Head of the Church, he dare not divest himself of it for the sake of gratifying any number of individuals, however respectable for parts and piety. Their charging him with imitating the pope he successfully answered by contrasting his sentiments and conduct with those of the Roman pontiff. The latter affirms, “ that every christian must do all he bids, and believe all he says, under pain of

damnation:" but the former never affirmed any thing that bears the most distant resemblance to such unscriptural and absurd tenets.

It is foreign to the nature of this work to enter into an elaborate discussion of the various modes of church government; a subject on which the wise and good are greatly divided. But that the ministers of the gospel, being pastors and public teachers, should possess a portion of authority, is too obvious to need many arguments in its support. To suppose that a flock is its own pastor; that pupils are their own teachers; and that the people are their own rulers, would, if acted upon, destroy all government, civil as well as religious. Pure democracy in church or state is a chimera replete with absurdity; and incompatible with the existence of either. In the churches termed Independent, notwithstanding the theory of each of the members possessing considerable power, it will be found in fact, that a few individuals rule both the minister and the people; and that these few individuals are merely secular men, from whose decisions in church affairs there can be no successful appeal. In all denominations, for whose ministers the State makes no provision, there is a perpetual verging towards too much power in the people; a power, which being regulated by no fixed principles, but subject to the caprice and ignorance of the multitude, always

tends to barbarism and disorganization. Popular assemblies, even when composed of persons of principle, property, and education, rarely exist without being productive of evil ; of how much greater evil, then, must those assemblies be productive which are made up of the uninformed mass of the people, whose habits of life never permitted them to become acquainted with the difficult and delicate science of government ? Truth is consistent and immutable ; but the decisions of the multitude are various, unstable, and generally absurd and contradictory. The generality of candidates for power in church and state flatter with their lips those men by whose suffrages they expect to be advanced, while at the same time they despise them in their hearts. Popular elections in the civil world, (such is the depraved state of men in general,) are often injurious to the morals of the people ; but in religious affairs they are still more destructive. Mr. Wesley had proper views of such maxims as these ; and consequently retained to the last that power with which, as the founder of a society, he was on the most defensible ground possessed. He had neither will nor power to constrain either preachers or people to unite with him ; and such as offered themselves for that purpose, did it on condition of submitting to the rules and discipline which he had formed. They were at perfect liberty, whenever they chose, to leave a society into which

they voluntarily entered. Their withdrawing did not subject them to the smallest penalty. While the fundamental rules of the body were not infringed neither the people nor preachers had any cause to complain of Mr. Wesley's power. To say he was mistaken with respect to some characters is only to say he was human ; for what man, or number of men can justly lay claim to infallibility ? But that he used his power, not to the injury, but edification of preachers and people, volumes might be written to demonstrate.

SECTION VIII.

SOME ACCOUNT OF THE DEED OF DECLARATION EXECUTED BY MR. WESLEY, AND THE CONTENTIONS WHICH TOOK PLACE ON ITS BEING PUBLISHED.

WHATEVER men skilled in legal decisions may say concerning the utility of the Deed of Declaration ; and others advance concerning the propriety of choosing some of the preachers composing the hundred, who by it were legally styled *the Conference* ; the candid and judicious will not only acknowledge the purity of Mr. Wesley's motives in the whole affair, but likewise give him credit for having, in that instance, manifested the most sincere desire for the future welfare of the connexion. He acted, as himself declared,

from the best of his judgment. The chief reason for his executing that deed at all was, that he might secure the chapels to the connexion at large, and consequently prevent their becoming the private property of the respective trustees to whom they were legally consigned for the use of the Conference. His letter, to be read after his death, to the Conference, fully proves that he never wished the hundred to act in any measure toward the rest of the preachers so as that they should suffer in their appointments or pecuniary concerns. That he originally intended that those legally termed the Conference should have some peculiar authority in regulating the affairs of the connexion, is demonstrable. If not, why did he not nominate such preachers without exception, as were of the longest standing in the ministry; and who were, with regard to talents, of the greatest respectability? They would have answered every *legal* purpose as well as those junior brethren. But that more was meant by the Deed than any thing merely legal, is evident from Mr. Wesley saying, that he would have inserted the names of those preachers who reflected on his choice, if he had had so good an opinion of them as they had of themselves. Whatever was his opinion of them, he continued them preachers in his connexion; and they were of course every way eligible to any thing of a legal nature in which the Methodist body could be interested. Who is so dull as not

to discern that more was intended by the Deed of Declaration than the bare security of chapels? What those things were we are without sufficient documents to determine with certainty: the following, however, appear probable.

Mr. Wesley was too well acquainted with human nature and church history to be attached to popular government. Large deliberative assemblies, when subject to no controul, have seldom, if ever, been remarkable for wise decisions. Paine himself, that conceited and infidel politician, after witnessing the horrid effects of his chimerical system realized in France, compared *one* legislative assembly to an individual, and called its decisions despotic; by which he meant tyrannical and absurd. The ridiculous and cruel decrees issued forth by popular assemblies, uncontrouled by any authority, are so many standing proofs of the necessity of a degree of *permanent power* being placed *somewhere*, for the purpose of keeping legislative authority in proper bounds. Mr. Wesley, being a friend to order and stable government, in all probability designed that the hundred preachers, whose names were inserted in the Deed of Declaration, should possess the full power with which himself was invested. If so, he intended, that, at least, a majority of them should be decidedly in favour of every new rule and regulation, previous to its being adopted by the connexion.

In a preceding part of this section it has been proved that the hundred were chosen for more than a legal purpose. Their piety and attachment to the doctrines and discipline of Methodism were of course their chief recommendations to Mr. Wesley's choice; superior talents were to him, in such a case, only of secondary consideration. He chose therefore such men from among the preachers, as he conceived most devoted to God, and soundest in doctrine and discipline. That some of these men were not what Mr. Wesley apprehended, is no reflection on him; it only argues him liable to mistake in common with others. To the same cause we must refer what needs not to be concealed, namely, that in the choice of the hundred, certain preachers were omitted who were in every respect more eligible than some to whom the preference was given. It holds in religious, as well as civil life, that favour is not always to men of skill.

If the few preachers, who conceived themselves injured by Mr. Wesley's preferring others, had been deeply humble, and seriously weighed matters, they would have used no violent measure, much less withdrawn in disgust from the connexion. No change had been made, nor even attempted, in doctrine or discipline. Those who disapproved of the Deed of Declaration might have, without any molestation, gone on their way, as usual, preach-

ing the gospel, and doing all the good in their power. They were at perfect liberty to use, on that and every other subject, the right of private judgment. But they had no right to disturb the peace of the connexion; nor ought they to have confounded the welfare of Methodism with their being, in preference to others, vested with authority. The men who are fondest of power are, of all others, the aptest to be tyrants. That no lord-
ing it over the preachers or people was intended by the selection of the hundred is absolutely certain. Had two-thirds of that number, or even a simple majority, been necessary in favour of any new rule previous to its being debated in Conference, the connexion would not have been agitated or torn as it has been by men inimical to genuine Methodism. The hundred might have acted in every important affair as a second house, and been consequently a check on the rest of the preachers; all of whom, since the Deed has been filled by seniority, have been comparatively young, and who, on several occasions, it may be feared, vote without thoroughly understanding the question. With such a restraint, the Conference, in its debates and decisions, would have been sufficiently free and popular for every valuable purpose. But no such restraint existing, the hundred being blended with the mass of the preachers, one of the most valuable ends which might have been answered by the Deed of Declaration has no existence.

SECTION IX.

MR. WESLEY'S STRONG ATTACHMENT TO THE ESTABLISHED CHURCH; AND SOME ACCOUNT OF HIS SEVERITY TOWARDS THE CLERGY IN THE EARLY AND LATTER PART OF HIS LIFE, &c.

IT has been already observed in the course of this work, that Mr. Wesley set out in the great work of reformation with the warmest attachment to the established Church. That he attached to episcopal ordination a large share of authority, and considered its sanction of very great importance, is evident from his professing to countenance lay preachers only on the supposition of their being extraordinary messengers. Such were his sentiments when, in his Address to the Clergy, he denominated Simon Magus a saint in comparison with such clergymen as denied the doctrine of inspiration. In his sermon on, "Beware of false prophets," he considered the bulk of Church ministers as of that description; and yet at the same time would give no countenance to any who pleaded the necessity of the Methodists forming themselves into an independent body. His reasons for their continuing in the Church, notwithstanding the acknowledged and much to be lamented carelessness of the clergy in general, will always have great weight with the candid and judicious.

In the decline of his life, it must be confessed, that he deviated in some instances relating to church matters, far from his youthful views and professions. The cases in which he allowed service in his chapels in church hours would, by no very forced construction, have rendered it general through his connexion. His making the Methodists judges of the morals and doctrines of the clergy, in order to determine whether they should have service in their own chapels in canonical hours, afforded a pretext for all who were so inclined to withdraw from the Establishment. Making the doctrines and morals of the clergy any condition of the Methodists going to Church was undeniably an innovation in their economy. Immorality in the life of the officiating minister, his preaching unconditional election, Arianism, or any other doctrine equally destructive, were individually laid down as a justification of the Methodists preaching in church hours. It is well known that most of the pious clergy are Calvinists; and that unconditional election is essential to Calvinism. I would by no means insinuate that those ministers are Antinomians; for notwithstanding the *peculiarities* of their system imply antinomianism, they are so happily inconsistent as to insist upon the necessity of obedience to the precepts of the gospel in order to final salvation. The truth is, that though they believe that Christ died for no more than a certain portion of mankind, they

live and preach as if they believed that God "would, without exception, have all men to be saved." Thus are they practically right notwithstanding their retaining, what I conceive to be, some speculative errors. And I see no reason why the Methodists might not hear them with pleasure and profit. It is to be hoped that there are extremely few, if any, Arian ministers in the Church of England. Arians reading the Church service, or holding Church livings must be considered by all honest men as the basest of characters. Gilbert Wakefield, with all his heterodoxy and eccentricities, was too manly and honest to continue to officiate in a Church, the doctrines of which he did not believe.

Many of the clergy attend upon such amusements as are unsuitable to their holy profession, and such as the Methodists consider, and not without reason, immoral. The sermons of such clergymen are generally in point of evangelical truth, extremely defective. How seldom do they contain any thing descriptive on the subject of a "death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness?" How rarely do they describe penitent sinners saying, "we do earnestly repent, and are heartily sorry for our misdoings; the remembrance of them is grievous to us; the burden of them is intolerable?" How seldom do they represent "godly persons, such as feel in themselves the

working of the Spirit of Christ, mortifying the works of the flesh; and drawing up their minds to high and heavenly things?" Those who are acquainted with the Book of Common Prayer need not to be told where to find the places from whence the quotations contained in this paragraph have been taken. The Methodists, well accustomed to hear the doctrines of repentance, faith, pardon, and holiness inculcated, could easily discover the defects of such sermons; and believing that the gospel plan of salvation was not laid down in them, would readily excuse themselves for not hearing them delivered. This many of them did, while others cleaved to the Church more tenaciously than ever. The judicious reader will readily see how wide a door was opened for separation from the Church, by making the attendance of the Methodists depend in any measure on their views of the lives and doctrines of the clergy. Doing so was a manifest deviation from primitive Methodism.

That Mr. Wesley's mind, toward the close of his life, was much alienated from the Church is evident from his calling several of its clergy "heathenish priests and mitred infidels;" his pronouncing himself a "scriptural bishop;" abridging the Common Prayer-book for the use of his chapels; and his ordaining several of his preachers, and that not merely for Scotland and America.

It must be confessed that he left matters in a train for the Methodists' gradually separating from the Church. Whether he himself discerned this is doubtful; for to the last, in a general way, he advised them, by cleaving to the Church, to avoid becoming a separate body. Through life he declared, and no doubt with the utmost sincerity, that he deviated no further from the Church than he considered himself bound in conscience to do.

It is natural now to inquire, after what has been said, and which admits of the clearest proof, who can vindicate Mr. Wesley's consistency? If by his consistency be meant his never changing his mind in any matter relative to Methodism, it is not defensible. At first he was much averse to lay preaching; but afterwards entertained a different sentiment. For a time he was a great admirer of the mystic writers; but in the course of some years wrote and preached against them. He changed his mind greatly concerning the Moravians. The truth of the matter is, that he was always willing to receive increasing light, and open to conviction. He invariably followed, what he apprehended to be the openings of Providence. He was consistent in extraordinary diligence in the work of the ministry, and in unreserved devotedness to God, and this was the most excellent consistency.

Much may be urged for and against the partial separation from the Church which has taken place among the Methodists. The best argument in its favour seems to be, that by having service in church hours, and the sacraments administered in their own chapels, the members of the society are prevented from attending the ministrations of the various sects of dissenters which abound in many parts of the United Kingdom. Several who were once Methodists have become members of Independent congregations. Their becoming such is attributed to the ordinances not being administered in those parts of the Methodist connexion in which they resided. But admitting that, on account of the attachment of the Methodists to the Church, several of their society joined the Independents, was not their loss more than supplied from that church to which they were disaffected? —Necessity alone is a sufficient reason for separating from a religious community. At the Reformation a separation from the Church of Rome was necessary on several accounts; but more especially because that church would not tolerate the reformers within its pale. Had they been permitted to preach the gospel in its purity, and worship God according to the dictates of their conscience; the most holy, sober, and judicious among them would not have scrupled at living and dying in the Romish communion. How much

better would it have been to have spread the savour of divine knowledge throughout the whole of the Western church, than by separating from it, to have the work of reformation confined to narrow limits? But such was the intolerant spirit of that church, that reformers, instead of being countenanced in it, had every reason to expect the severest persecution. The fate of John Huss, and Jerome of Prague, shews what the best and wisest men had reason to apprehend, for endeavouring to reform a church which arrogated infallibility to itself, and condemned all other churches as heretical. In short, the reformers were *forced* to separate from the Church of Rome; and their doing so has been of singular advantage to the cause of christianity; and even to the Roman Catholics themselves. But no such necessity was ever laid on any of the Methodists to separate from the Church of England. Such of them as have withdrawn from the Church urge, that as Methodists they were *tolerated* only on the ground of their being Dissenters; and that they have done no more than avail themselves of a privilege to which they were legally entitled. Whatever inferences may be drawn from the Conventicle Act, an act which extremely few ever think of enforcing, all the Methodists who attend the church and sacrament are virtually, and to all useful intents and purposes members of the established Church. Their being so affords them many opportunities of

enforcing on the minds of those who attend the church service, the grand doctrines of the gospel, all which they can prove from the articles and liturgy believed by them in common with their fellow-worshippers. Had the first Methodists formed themselves into an independent body, or even gone as far that way as many of the modern Methodists have done, it is morally certain that they would not have been that large and respectable body which they are at present. Time and experience will prove whether what contributed so long to the increase of Methodism was no longer necessary for that purpose. A general conclusion in favour of the Methodists' having the sacrament in their own chapels, and preaching in church hours, ought not to be drawn from increase of members in Manchester, Liverpool, and a few other places: the whole body should be taken into the account; and even that increasing, as it has considerably 'of late years, does not prove that it will continue to increase; nor that it would not have increased more had there been no changes made in the economy of Methodism. But on this subject, even among the wise and good, there will be much difference of opinion; and while I believe that my sentiments are just, knowing that there are numberless truths of which my understanding is not an adequate measure, I am far from accusing those of heresy and schism, who think differently.

SECTION X.

MR. WESLEY'S DEATH—CONVULSIONS IN THE METHODIST BODY--ABOUT FIVE THOUSAND SEPARATED THEMSELVES FROM THE CONNEXION, AND FORMED A POPULAR CHURCH GOVERNMENT.

MR. WESLEY, the venerable Founder of Methodism, died in 1791, with all the composure, humble confidence, and joy becoming a character who had so faithfully served God in his generation. His death was sincerely lamented by the whole of that body at whose head he had so long appeared to his own credit and their advantage. On his demise many preachers and people apprehended fatal convulsions and divisions in that connexion, to which from its commencement, he had been a centre of union. His own conjectures concerning the preachers dividing into three parts; some procuring episcopal ordination; others setting up for themselves after the manner of the Independents; and the rest adhering to primitive Methodism, were without foundation: so little could even a man eminently wise and good see into futurity!

The first unpleasant circumstance after his death to the Methodist body was a warm contention about writing his Life. Coke and Moore's Life of

him made its appearance shortly after that written by the Rev. Mr. Hampson. Their work is a most excellent compilation, arranged with much judgment, and cannot fail to give much satisfaction to those who are unacquainted with the Methodist economy; but it possesses too little originality to make it sufficiently interesting to such readers as are well acquainted with the documents from which it is chiefly composed. Either of those gentlemen was adequate to the task of giving the world an *original* history of Mr. Wesley; such a one as could not fail of popularity. It is a curious fact, that while the lives of Mess. Brainard and Walsh are read with avidity by the Methodists in general, that of Mr. Wesley is comparatively little known. It is the fate of some valuable works, to fall into neglect. How few authors in this writing age can console themselves with the hope of being read by remote posterity? The press is constantly teeming with productions which, on being cursorily read, are consigned to oblivion; perhaps one in a thousand, and not the most excellent, escapes the general wreck.

Hampson's *Life of Mr. Wesley* is an interesting performance. Notwithstanding the freedom he took in colouring too strongly the shades of the character he depicted, his work does honour to himself and its subject. They must be under the power of prejudice, or little acquainted with

human nature, who consider that production as the work of an enemy.

The Life written by Dr. Whitehead is by some preferred to either of the former ; but it is no part of my business to decide on their comparative merits.

Various were the opinions of the preachers, (their Founder being removed) concerning the mode of church government which they should adopt. It is thought that some of the oldest preachers were for investing a few of their brethren in the ministry with authority nearly, if not altogether equal to what Mr. Wesley had possessed. Some of these had acted as a council, in matters of importance, under the direction of their late venerable friend and spiritual father. Should it be admitted that they desired to fill the office of Superintendents over the Methodist body, they ought not on that account to be reproached. That had they been invested with superior authority, they would have used it, not to the purposes of tyranny but edification, all unprejudiced persons acquainted with their character will readily acknowledge. And after all the "railing accusations" which have been brought against what has been called, by way of reproach, the Bishop-plan, much might be urged in its favour. Superior officers appear favourable to the stability and im-

provement of all corporate bodies whether civil or religious. Had a few such been constituted at Mr. Wesley's death, it is probable that the Methodist body would not have been subjected to the convulsions which it has undergone. But such were the jealousies of the preachers of one another, that the idea of investing any with superior power was held by the body at large in the greatest abhorrence. This being the case, however useful an executive power, consented to, might have been, its being forced on the connexion would have at once produced a very general division; and such a division would have been attended with incalculable mischief to Methodism in particular and the interests of vital religion in general.

The plan of an executive government by a few not being adopted, that by Districts was established with general approbation. In the formation of this plan considerable wisdom was manifested. The late Mr. William Thompson, a man of piety and good parts, had a great share in its formation; and such was the approbation it procured, that he was called to fill the place of President at the ensuing Conference. And after having filled the chair with credit, he proposed, (which was voted into a law,) that the same person should not, till after the elapse of eight years, fill the place of president. This rule, however applauded, and whatever degree of credit it reflected on the heart

of him who proposed it, has been attended with disadvantages. It bears a semblance of liberty, but does not possess the substance ; for by its operation, the most suitable person in the connexion may be precluded from the chair merely from the circumstance of his having filled it, though with universal approbation. A man in so high and important an office, however qualified, is apt, for the first time, to be disconcerted ; but on his being rechosen, and awhile in the habit of presiding, he would obtain that confidence so very necessary for moderating a popular assembly. The extremes of liberty border on anarchy ; and are often more to be dreaded than despotism itself. The regulation now in question partook in some measure of the spirit of the times, which like a mighty torrent, under the appellations of candour, liberty, and rights, was moving rapidly towards the overthrow of all order and constituted authorities.

The disputes concerning the introduction of the sacraments into the Methodist chapels, were conducted shortly after with a warmth and asperity little to the credit of many who engaged in them. Each contending party had much to say in favour of the cause it espoused. The *lawfulness* of any religious body having the sacraments administered by its own ministers will hardly be disputed by men of reason and religion ; but considering the

relative situation of the Methodists, with all their professions of not separating from the Church, the *expediency* of their having the sacraments from their own preachers was strongly, rationally, and justly disputed. Debates on that subject paved the way to the partial division of the connexion which took place in 1797, at the Leeds Conference. From voting the sacrament into their respective societies, several of the people, instigated by Mr. Kilham, one of the preachers, proceeded to demand the admission of delegates into the Conference, in number equal to the preachers, and invested with equal authority. To bring about this favourite measure, several publications were addressed to the people reflecting on the parts, piety, and even moral honesty of some of the preachers. There is nothing easier than to blame, and ask questions. It is sufficient here to say, that the above charges were unfounded. It is foreign to the nature of this work, to enter into detail of any kind ; but especially of a contest in which the religious world is at present little interested. Suffice it to mention some of the consequences of that separation, from which its abettors promised themselves much honour and success, and threatened its opposers with defeat and infamy.

That the forementioned partial division of the Methodist body was attended with some evils can-

not be disputed. In small societies where it took place the evil was felt most sensibly ; especially when the friends of the division took possession of the chapels. And wherever it took place, the mutual contentions, to which it gave birth tended to offend the weak, and harden the profane. Much scandal was a part of its destructive fruit ; nor is it in the power of man to calculate the spiritual injuries received by many through its instrumentality. On the other hand, it would argue much ignorance to deny its utility. Several of those who separated had imbibed popular and unscriptural notions of church government ; and, not content with the right of private judgment, had used the utmost industry to propagate their favourite opinions. For this purpose they turned Leaders' and Quarterly Meetings into assemblies for popular debate on what they called their religious rights and privileges. It would be uncharitable to attribute their proceedings to bad motives ; but that they erred egregiously in their novel regulations subsequent events have demonstrated. All needless contentions being in their nature inimical to genuine piety, the Methodist body at large gained much by those who were fondest of "doubtful disputations" ceasing to be its members. On their withdrawing, the meetings originally designed for religious purposes were conducted in general in a manner worthy of their first institution. They had, on their separa-

tion, a fair opportunity, of trying what their boasted rights, and free unshackled government could effect. Their departure was attended by considerable peace and prosperity among those they forsook ; so that notwithstanding about five thousand withdrew at the separation, that number, and an additional three thousand were added before the returning Conference. Contention having in a great measure ceased, Methodism has since rapidly increased throughout the United Kingdom. After weighing in impartial balances the goods and evils of the late separation in the connexion, it appears that the former greatly preponderate.

SECTION XI.

REMARKS ON THE PIETY AND ABILITIES OF THE PRESENT METHODIST PREACHERS.

THAT in a body of preachers consisting of about four hundred and sixty, a great variety in the degrees of their piety and parts should subsist, is no way surprising. With respect to piety, the degrees of it possessed by each, can be known only to the Searcher of Hearts. Perhaps those among them most famed for devotion are not superior to their brethren in whom nothing extraordinary is apparent. The dullness and gravity

which are the effects of constitution are often considered by the ignorant as marks of uncommon sanctity; while the cheerfulness and vivacity which are the result of a sanguine complexion, expose those in whom they are innocently prevalent to the censure of such inadequate judges. They know little of human nature, who judge of the degrees of piety possessed by any, from the circumstance of natural seriousness. A good flow of animal spirits is a great blessing; and properly regulated, is favourable to every thing lovely and of good report. Upon the whole, all the preachers profess sincere and true piety; nor are any permitted, after forfeiting their religious character, to remain in the connexion. And as there is no other body of ministers, whose morals undergo so frequent and severe a scrutiny, we may conclude, in the judgment of charity, that they are all truly pious.

In examining the abilities of the Methodist preachers, we may, without offering violence to that charity which "thinketh no ill where no ill seems," speak with more freedom and decision.—Taking those preachers in the aggregate, perhaps there is not another corporate body in the world possessed of superior natural talents. To a liberal education most of them have no pretension; yet several among them are far from illiterate, having acquired by indefatigable industry a com-

petent knowledge of the learned languages, and of science in general. Some among them, it must be confessed, can neither speak nor write their mother tongue grammatically; and yet, notwithstanding this shameful defect, such is the force of natural talent assisted by constant reading and study, that certain of these, save in grammatical knowledge, are far from despicable preachers. With important matter well digested, and with hearts glowing for the welfare of mankind, they deliver truths infinitely interesting, with natural manly eloquence. What men know well, and feel sensibly, though destitute of the advantages of education, they speak of with pathos and energy. It would, however, be extremely partial to say that all the Methodist preachers possess good natural parts; for individuals among them do not possess strength of intellect; nor would it be in the power of the most learned education to raise them above a grovelling mediocrity. Education may develope, but cannot give genius; hence several men famed for learning are incapable of writing a page worthy of public inspection. That the Greeks despised and accounted barbarous all languages except their own, is well known to the reading world. This truth, however, is not designed to hint, that a knowledge of the learned languages is not attended with many advantages, but to soften the censure of such as attach too much importance to that acquisition. This in-

deed is oftener done by men of "little learning" than good scholars, who are much fewer, notwithstanding the numbers that take degrees, than the illiterate can easily imagine.

There are few subjects which have not been ably handled by the learned, in our own language. It is a language which possesses at present a great measure of relative perfection; nor is it on the decline, notwithstanding all that the admirers of antiquity, and fastidious critics assert to the contrary. No country has ever produced more learned and able divines than this; and most of their works being in English, they afford the mere English scholar the means of acquiring a vast variety of knowledge, especially in all parts of the sublime science of divinity. This may in some measure account for the phenomenon of good preachers without learning, to which character several Methodist preachers are justly entitled.— Their general acceptance with the people, and well known success in inculcating the blessed truths of the gospel, prove, that unaffected piety and unwearied zeal, are more *essential* requisites for preaching the word, than the most admired literary talents. "I was no prophet," said an eminent servant of God in ancient days, "neither was I a prophet's son; but I was an herdman, and a gatherer of sycamore fruit. And the Lord took me as I followed the flock, and the Lord said

unto me; Go prophesy unto my people Israel." I mean nothing enthusiastic by this quotation; but would only insist, that those who are not "moved by the Holy Ghost" to undertake the cure of souls, however respectable they may be in the literary world, are essentially unqualified for the work of the ministry. Learning is good and useful for a preacher of the gospel; but genuine piety and an inward call, such as is expressed in the office for ordination, are essential.

Notwithstanding the general defect of Methodist preachers in point of literature, such are their qualifications for the pulpit, that many of them appear there to peculiar advantage. And were it not for the purity of the doctrines, and strictness of the morals they inculcate, thousands, of taste, sense, and education, who unhappily "walk after the course of this world," would sit under their ministry with delight. The doctrines and morals of these preachers, not their style and manner, excite the censure of loose, thoughtless characters. Who can please and profit the giddy and profane; the senseless admirers of childish amusements; the dissipated throng, who have neither grace nor sense to be usefully employed; and who, instead of redeeming time, reckon "one moment unamused a misery?" "Sherlock, Hare, and Gibson," would, if yet on earth, preach in vain to such silly characters. Continuing such as

they are, their censure is praise, and their approbation infamy. They equally disrelish and despise the essential truths of christianity, whether they hear them delivered from the pulpit of their Parish Church, or from that of a Methodist Chapel.

SECTION XII.

LEADERS AND STEWARDS FREQUENTLY DEBATE AND VOTE ON THE SUBJECT OF STATIONING THE PREACHERS—THEY DECIDE ON EACH OTHERS' CHARACTERS—AND ON THE CHARACTERS OF THE PRIVATE MEMBERS—THE EVILS CONSEQUENT ON SUCH INNOVATIONS IN METHODISM.

ORIGINAL Methodism knew nothing of majorities composed of leaders and stewards determining for or against the reception or continuance of preachers ; and well would it have been for the connexion if such a mode of decision had never been adopted. It was little known till after the death of Mr. Wesley. It gathered strength while the mania for chimerical rights was desolating Europe, and threatening to dissolve the bonds of both civil and religious society. Methodism gave no countenance to political discussions, and absolutely prohibited its adherents taking any steps inimical to that most excellent government under which they enjoyed all the ad-

vantages which they could reasonably desire. That several Methodists imbibed, in some measure, the disorganizing spirit of the times is indubitably certain. Their religious economy prevented them from entering into the turbulent and dangerous field of politics ; and hence, debarred from taking a part in civil reforms, they resolved to reform Methodism. On reading several inflammatory pamphlets and anonymous circular letters, which represented their church government as a compound of priestcraft and tyranny, they began to think seriously of some mode for the redress of what they imagined serious grievances. The cry of the priestcraft and tyranny of the preachers was echoed throughout the connexion ; and many a cold-hearted, fallen Methodist asserted that the preachers had "lost the confidence of the people." The Conference, for the sake of peace, conceded to the clamorous faction, who called themselves the people, one degree of authority after another, till they put it out of their own power to dismiss a leader from his office without the sanction of a Leaders' Meeting, or take a preacher, however qualified, into their connexion, if a majority at a Quarterly Meeting should express its disapprobation. The leaders and stewards being constituted judges of themselves and the people, the transition was easy to their determining that no preacher should be continued a second year, if they resolved on his removal. This

last degree of authority they assumed ; for it was never conceded. But this does not prevent their exercising it without control ; nor is there any appeal from their decision.

A theorist can discover nothing, in all that has been conceded to the inferior officers of the Methodist body, but the recovery of their unalienable rights ; and a proper balance of power between the preachers and people. But a man acquainted with human nature, and civil and religious government, can easily discern the seeds of anarchy and dissolution in the powers with which so large a body of stewards and leaders are invested. Were they fully exerted at present, they could not fail to cut the sinews of discipline.—Inferior officers, in any community, exercising supreme power, is incompatible with the wisdom, order, and authority essential to its being rightly governed. It is a maxim founded in truth, “that those who think must govern those that toil.” Authority in the multitude is subject to the continual and successful attacks of ignorance, passion, and prejudice ; and, after all the fine-spun theories that have appeared on the natural equality of man, and the absurdity of the few governing the many ; matter of fact, which is the proper test of theory, demonstrates that popular government is of all others the most destructive of human happiness. An hereditary King, and a house of Lords, independent

of the people, prevent the government of this country from falling under my idea of popular.

Ministers of the gospel, though provided for by the civil power, when they are prevented from inflicting civil penalties, cannot possess too much authority. Where then is the danger of power in the hands of such pastors as are merely tolerated, and whose subsistence depends on the voluntary contributions of the people who choose to sit under their ministry? Any, or all of them, may withdraw without incurring any civil or religious penalty; nor have their ministers the advantage which those of the Establishment possess, namely, to receive their income in case of such an event. It is not therefore strange, that a sensible dissenting teacher, on feeling the crushing power of his congregation, said, an Independent minister should have an independent fortune.

The evils consequent on the conceded and assumed powers of the leaders and stewards in the Methodist connexion, respect themselves, the people, and the preachers. Those powers which they frequently exert in determining on the characters of each other, as well as of the private members, become a fruitful source of evil surmising and popular debate. Beside, many leaders being poor, without more grace, sense, and resolution, than they ordinarily possess, it cannot be

expected that they should not be afraid of censuring their opulent brethren. Dependence on the Accused, and dread of their displeasure, render them very inadequate judges. Wealth in the religious, as well as civil world, influences, more or less, all who are dependent on its possessors. Hence it is, that a few opulent leaders can generally procure a majority in favour of any measure which they choose to bring forward. Leaders' Meetings, therefore, with a semblance of liberty, are often in fact under the control of a *few* active, rich men, not always the best friends of Methodism. I do not intend these Strictures as an impeachment of the piety of those poor men who are influenced by their opulent brethren; the laws of their nature and the imperiousness of circumstances plead in their favour. It is evident that the leaders in general have transferred their subjection from the preachers to a few, and often not the most devout, of their own body. Let a simple majority be procured for the dismissal of any of them from office, and they have, however aggrieved, no superior from whom they can hope for redress. They must, however reluctant, submit to a decision which probably owed its existence to the absence of a few individuals.—But how difficult is it, in the present state of Methodism, to dismiss rich men from office unless they be glaringly immoral? They may be covetous, lukewarm, and dead to divine things, and still continue lea-

ders, unless a majority of their brethren determine otherwise. Had the preachers still, as they ought, and had formerly, the power of receiving and dismissing leaders, they might, according to the direction of their Founder, dismiss such as they discovered unfit for their office. But now improper leaders, and known to be such, may, in opposition to the minds of the preachers, remain in the connexion. This is not meant as a *general* censure of leaders, many of whom adorn their profession. The system which, with popular forms, is a capricious oligarchy, is the object of my censure. But were the system in fact popular, as it appears to be, it would, in its operations be more destructive than it is ; for oligarchy, with all its inconveniences, is preferable to a government by the many. And here it is only justice to add, that when the few rich leaders are deeply pious, which is frequently the case, they are of essential service to both preachers and people. Sometimes, by their wisdom and influence, they suppress such popular clamours as are destructive of peace and unity ; and in several cases they prove a bond of union to the respective societies with which they are connected.

The private members of the Methodist body are kept, by the power conceded to, and exercised by, their leaders, from that nearness to, and dependence on, the preachers which would be much to

their comfort and edification. Previous to the regulations in question being adopted, they looked up *immediately* to their preachers as children to parents; were delighted with their approbation, and afraid of their censure: but now a stated body of leaders, many of whom are under undue influence, stands between them and the men who "feed them with knowledge and understanding." Even in case of a severe or unjust censure passed by the leaders, it is not in the power of the preachers to soften it in the smallest degree. The history of mankind proves, that it is an essential property of popular governments to be unacquainted with mercy. Being destitute of vigour and promptitude sufficient for repressing crimes, and allowing none a prerogative, by the exercise of which mercy may be extended to proper subjects, the consequence is, that under such governments, some offend with impunity, and others are punished with unrelenting severity. These opposite evils naturally and necessarily arise from the too great numbers which compose deliberative and judicial assemblies in most democracies. Multiplying the numbers of a privileged order, who are to decide on their own conduct and that of others, is to put it in the power of many to offend with impunity. It follows, that the Methodists, through the powers exercised by their leaders, are subject to the two great evils of popular government, namely, severity to some and indulgence to others.

It may indeed be objected, that these evils exist but in a slight degree at present. This will be acknowledged; for the allowed purity of morals, both of the great body of the leaders and people, prevents their being generally felt, but the principle which will, if permitted to operate, unavoidably produce them is contained in the system under consideration.

The preachers frequently feel to their sorrow the effects of their ceded and assumed powers of leaders and stewards. How must a man of sense be mortified, when, after labouring faithfully in a circuit for a year, an assembly, in general composed of persons of little information, make his continuing a second year a matter of popular debate to be determined by a simple majority? With parts, piety, and usefulness unimpeached, he must be removed, if a majority can be procured for the purpose. His faithfulness and impartiality giving offence to a few active individuals may be his only crime; and for that he must remove, however inconvenient to himself and his family. But what renders such a decision peculiarly absurd and oppressive, is, that no provision is made to prevent his known and determined enemies from sitting as his judges. When no charge can be brought against his morals, doctrines, or talents; pride and ignorance may combine to effect his removal, under the pretext that another preacher

may possibly be more popular ; and his judges, some of whom are of the lowest order of the people, entering the boundless and promising region of possibility, dismiss him on pure speculation.

SECTION XIII.

SOME ACCOUNT OF THE LEADERS AND STEWARDS IN THE METHODIST CONNEXION.

THE great body of Leaders and Stewards in the Methodist connexion is composed of persons truly religious ; nor are any of them permitted to remain in office, or even in the society, without maintaining a good moral character. Genuine and deep piety is the most essential qualification for a leader ; but alone is insufficient. A certain portion of knowledge is necessary in order to enable any to instruct others in public or private ; for who can teach a science of which he is ignorant ? But as the essentials of religion lie in a small compass, being comprised in a few first principles, leaders deeply pious, though very un-read, and possessed of no more than moderate natural parts, are very useful in their office. To expect purity of style and correctness of phrase from men in the lower walks of life, in which the generality of Methodist leaders are found, would be highly unreasonable. They are not to be con-

sidered in the light of public teachers ; their place being to pray with their respective classes, and take the lead in the religious conversations carried on in them. Though an inferior order of church officers, they are of vast importance to the Methodist body. When much alive to divine things, they prove a general blessing to those over whom they are appointed to watch ; nor can it be denied, that when any of them drink into the spirit of the world, they diffuse a portion of it among their respective classes. Men are strangely prone to reconcile themselves to a degree of devotion and strictness of morals inferior to what they discover in those whose duty it is, by example as well as precept, to instruct others. Hence, the necessity of eminent piety in all church officers.

SECTION XIV.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE DOCTRINE OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION AS BELIEVED BY THE METHODISTS IN GENERAL ; WITH AN IMPARTIAL ACCOUNT OF CERTAIN OF ITS PROFESSORS, WHO IN SOME PLACES ARE DISTINGUISHED BY THE APPELLATION OF LIVELY METHODISTS.

IT is foreign to my design in this work to engage in a formal controversy on any point of divinity, much more on an *opinion* concerning chris-

tian perfection, which can indeed claim men of parts and piety in its favour ; but whose opponents have not been less respectable for either. The Methodists in general maintain that the work of sanctification, or christian perfection, is both gradual and instantaneous ; that christians on believing with the heart unto righteousness, are made partakers of the Divine nature ; that continuing faithful from the time they believe, they die more and more unto sin ; and that the moment in which they become *wholly* dead to sin is that of their entire sanctification. But they maintain that the relative perfection for which they contend ; a perfection which admits of continual increase, and which is compatible with ignorance, mistake, and numberless infirmities inseparable from humanity, which may be improperly called sins ; they maintain, I say, that this perfection may be obtained any moment after a man is justified. In vindication of their views on this subject, they quote many passages of scripture, and occasionally some petitions from the liturgy of the Church of England. One of the ablest and most liberal defenders of the Methodists' view of christian perfection was the late pious and venerable Mr. Fletcher, vicar of Madely. It must be confessed, after reading what he has written on the subject, that the doctrine is defensible.—All sober christians will readily admit, that they are in no danger of being too holy ; and that their grand business in time is to recover the

Divine image, in order to their dwelling for ever in that place into which nothing unclean can possibly enter. And would all professors of genuine piety keep this broad ground, and judge charitably of the degrees of each others' piety, they would do more honour to christianity than they can possibly do by contending for or against any opinion which men may receive or reject without endangering their salvation. So sensible are several of the most intelligent Methodist preachers of this, that they believe, with Mr. Fletcher, that men may be preaching and printing against christian perfection, and yet be so happily inconsistent as to experience all for which its best, and most sober advocates contend. But this rational and christian liberality is not adopted by all the professors of christian perfection among the Methodists. Were they *all* that they profess, they would be of unspeakable value to any religious body; for, perfectly humble, and wholly resigned to the Divine will, and breathing the loving, generous spirit of the gospel, they would be so many living proofs of the truth, certainty, and amiableness of christianity. No evil-speaking; no judging of others; no calling them lifeless who do not embrace their peculiar opinions, would mark the progress of their conversation. Then they would appear to others as much better than their brethren in general, as they *profess* to be; and we should have more than their own word for believing that they "excel in

virtue." That some professors of christian perfection are *remarkable* for every grace and virtue which adorns the christian character is indisputable ; but that there is no necessary consequence of their embracing the doctrine in question, is evident from some of its professors being distinguished only from the rest of their brethren, by selfcomplacence, apparent vanity, evil-speaking, and censoriousness.—To condemn any doctrine because it has been abused, it must be confessed, is absurd ; and that of christian perfection, as maintained by the Methodists, may be founded in truth, notwithstanding the ignorance, vanity, and petulance of some of its professors. But admitting the doctrine to be true, how come any to profess it, who are no credit to religion ? One reason for this is the solifidian notion which they indulge, that if they can bring themselves to believe that they *are* cleansed from all sin, the effect of such believing is entire holiness. This notion is replete with every thing which militates against the humble, modest spirit of the gospel ; for according to it, a man increases in piety in proportion to the high opinion he forms of himself, than which nothing can be more unscriptural and absurd.

Another reason why some profess perfect love without possessing it, is their confining religion *too much* to experience, and, what they term, liveliness and power in acts of devotion. Making

piety to God, the whole, or nearly the whole of religion ; and not forming right views of the temperance, selfdenial, and love to all men, our enemies not excepted, commanded in the gospel ; they rashly conclude themselves perfect in love while their tempers and conversation discover that, like the Corinthians of old, they are yet carnal. Judging from partial and inadequate evidence of their growth in grace, it is not strange that they should determine unjustly in their own favour. Such counterfeit professors of christian perfection are a material injury to the Methodist body ; and, as far as their influence extends, to religion in general. Large professions of piety, without a suitable conduct, a conduct in its nature tending to promote “ glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill towards men,” are very inimical to the interests of christianity.

Sometimes God, in whose hands are the times and seasons, works out of his ordinary way, by turning in a short time numbers “ from darkness to light ;” but he does not usually continue so to work in any place for a long time without intermission. *Some* of the greatest professors of life and power among the Methodists, blame religious people on account of their want of faith for revivals of religion ; and are but too apt to estimate the piety of their preachers by their visible success. Our Lord himself, who had the Spirit without

measure, would have been blamed by this criterion ; for his flock was a little one indeed. To condemn the faithful watchmen who sound the trumpet, because the people do not take warning, but perish, is an effect of ignorant, abominable enthusiasm.

The chief uses of the doctrine of christian perfection, as taught by the Methodists in general, are to stir up believers to a growth in grace ; and to humble them on account of such tempers, words, and actions as they are taught to believe incompatible with purity of heart. But might not these ends be as effectually answered, by the preachers strongly and pointedly insisting on the doctrines and precepts of the gospel, without encouraging any to imagine, from their reception of any opinion, that they are a superior order of christians ? Whatever tends to sectarianism, self-admiration, or disunion of the truly pious, is either wrong in itself, or abused by its advocates. That without holiness no man shall see the Lord ; that when we have done all, we should humbly confess that we are unprofitable servants ; and that true religion causes its possessors to prefer their brethren to themselves ; are divine truths which tend to brotherly love, humility, and union. But men *strongly* professing that they are pure in heart, and considering all who do not *profess* to enjoy the same blessing, as an inferior order of christians,

tends to sectarianism, vanity, and disunion. It is difficult for those who believe themselves holier than their pious brethren, to prefer such to themselves. Now, we know that it is the nature of holiness to make those in whom it prevails, be "to others kind but to themselves severe;" but that an opinion possessed by any of their own superior sanctity produces a contrary effect.—A man's degree of holiness does not depend on his believing it more or less; for whatever his opinion on the subject may be, he is neither more nor less holy than he is inwardly and outwardly obedient to the Divine will as revealed in the oracles of God. Mr. Wesley's sentiments on this point highly merit insertion. In the last paragraph of the large Minutes we find the following very sober and scriptural passage: "Does not talking, without *proper caution*, of a justified or sanctified state, tend to mislead men? Almost naturally leading them to trust in what was done in *one moment*? Whereas we are every moment *pleasing* or *displeasing* to God, *according to our works*. According to the whole of our present inward tempers, and outward behaviour,"

SECTION XV.

THE CHILDREN OF THE METHODISTS MAKING NO PART OF THE METHODIST BODY IS A GREAT DEFECT IN THE RELIGIOUS ECONOMY OF THAT PEOPLE ; AND THE GRAND CAUSE WHY SO FEW OF THEM ARE TRULY PIOUS.

THAT a people so sincere and devout as the Methodists in general are, should be glaringly defective in the important duty of giving their children a religious education, will appear matter of surprise to such as have not considered that subject. Yet such is the fact ; and too obvious to escape the notice of serious observers. The children of parents belonging to all other religious communities make an essential part of the charge of such pastors as "take the oversight" of their parents ; but those belonging to the Methodists are excluded from that privilege. For their exclusion, their mistaken parents offer, what they think, the most cogent reasons. They roundly assert, that until their children be capable of choosing to be members of *some* religious body, they should not be considered as a part of *any*. Such a maxim is replete with absurdity and irreligion. Its absurdity appears from its leaving children without spiritual instructors when they stand in much need of their assistance, and when it may be afforded

with most hopes of success: and its irreligion appears from its being contrary to the practice of the church universal in the purest ages of christianity. Children, on being baptized, were admitted to all the privileges of church fellowship from which they could receive any advantage, during the three first centuries. Is it to be supposed that christianity, a science which has God for its author, has, like human sciences, been improved by time, study, and repeated experiments? Surely no: for the wisest and best judges of the subject allow that it was best exemplified in the lives, experience, doctrines, and discipline of the immediate followers of its divine Founder.—Parents never think of waiting till their children are supposed capable of forming a choice, previous to their subjecting them to tutors and discipline in order to their acquaintance with letters. In this case, they wisely use their authority, which if they did not, extremely few of their offspring would ever acquire any knowledge of literature. And, however difficult it may be to account for on moral principles, the not subjecting children to religious discipline renders their ever becoming religious extremely improbable.

The objections offered against the children of Methodists being considered as a part of the Methodist body are easily answered. Some Metho-

dists propose their union with the established Church as a reason against their children being considered as an essential part of the charge of the Methodist preachers. In whatever point of view this objection is considered, it must appear either weak or absurd. Were it conclusive, it would condemn the parents themselves for the deviations they have made from that Church of which they are inconsistent advocates. If they consider themselves still in connexion with the Church, notwithstanding their being members of the Methodist society; from what principle of reason, religion, or common sense, can they deny their children the same privilege? If they believe that the established clergy will better discharge the ministerial duties to their children than the Methodist preachers, they are culpable in making a choice of pastors for themselves which their reason condemns. But if they insist, that being Methodists does not constitute themselves dissenters, nor less affected to the Church than formerly; with what colour of reason can they deny their children the advantage of such a conclusion? The truth is, that several who urge the objection in hand, are not regular themselves in their attendance on the established worship; nor are their children subject to the discipline of any religious denomination. They are as "sheep without a shepherd."—Were all the established clergy truly pious, the Methodist society would be very *desirable*, if not *neces-*

sary, in order to the spread and growth of vital religion.

But the Methodists have more objections to offer against their children being incorporated into the Methodist body. Let us hear, and weigh them in the balances of scripture and reason. "Our children, they say, are unawakened; and their tempers and conduct are such as to disqualify them for members of our society."—That they do not in general know themselves, and that their tempers and conduct evince much original depravity, must be acknowledged: but all these things are far from proving, that they should be deprived of christian discipline and instruction. If they be entitled to the care of any pastors at all, it must be to that of those "who feed their parents with knowledge and understanding." To say that in early life they should have no religious instructors, is to oppose scripture, reason, and the wisest maxims of heathen antiquity.—Are their tempers and conduct opposed to the spirit of the gospel? What then? Chase the little wretches from the religious body to which their parents belong,—Ah! no: natural affection, reason, and religion plead otherwise. The children are young, ignorant, and inexperienced; foolishness is bound in their hearts, and they inherit the sore disease of sin from their first parents. And are they, so circumstanced, to be cast on the bleak common of life, and suffered

to grow up ignorant of divine things ; or gathered into the fold of the church, under the conduct of shepherds who care for their souls ?—All that can be urged on the greatness of their depravity, and irregularity of their conduct, while children, instead of proving that they should be deprived of the advantages of christian discipline and instruction, prove the reverse. The greater a patient's danger is, the more skilful should be his physicians, and the more exact his regimen. To leave him wholly to the management of ignorant nurses, while any hope of his recovery remained, would merit the severest censure. And are not the generality of parents as ignorant of divinity as nurses of physic ?—Without suitable instructors, how long might we expect the continuance of the arts and sciences ? And is religion alone the only thing of moment not to be taught scientifically ?

“ But were, say Methodist parents, our preachers to take charge of our children, and did we consequently bring them to the respective classes in which we meet, grown up persons would be offended, nor could they speak their experience with freedom in the presence of such company.” Were the principle admitted, and acted upon, that the Methodist preachers were to take charge of the children belonging to their people, the *mode* of their receiving religious instruction would not be worth a serious dispute. And yet many argu-

ments might be adduced in favour of their meeting with their parents in the religious assemblies called classes. The presence of the wise, pious, and discreet, has an amazingly good effect upon children; but, without proper superintendence, that of each other is generally productive of evil.— They must indeed have very contracted views of religion and human nature, who would scruple to declare “what God had done for their souls,” in the presence of children under fourteen years of age, and subject to proper discipline. There is nothing said in the Methodist classes which is not enforced from the Methodist pulpits. Would the parents belonging to that body have their children believe the doctrine of christian experience which they frequently hear inculcated in the public congregation? Unquestionably they would: why then should they debar them from the advantage of hearing it exemplified in the experience of such characters as, on many accounts, are calculated to conciliate their esteem and affection? “We might, some are ready to answer, by the plan proposed, prevail on our children to become moral; but with respect to their conversion, it is equally out of the power of preachers and parents.” Were it certain that good morals would be the only consequence of the proposed plan being adopted, they are of too much importance to justify its rejection. It is certain that there is no true religion without morality; and

that good morals, springing from right opinions, are highly favourable to true piety. The "form of godliness" may exist without the power; but the power never can without the form. Those who embrace the essential doctrines of christianity, and, as far as we can discern, act consistent with the precepts of the gospel, give satisfactory evidence of their sincerity; nor should they be condemned for not using the peculiar phraseology of any particular sect or denomination. Persons of *uniform good morals*, who do err in essential matters of faith, cannot, in the judgment of reason, candour, and religion, be proved destitute of vital religion. What proof have we of the piety of those parents who speak so lightly and unguardedly of good morals? Their morality; if in this they are essentially defective, their experience, though they should be wrapt by joy into the third heaven, is all delusion. "Circumcision is nothing, nor uncircumcision, but the keeping the commandments of God."

Inspiration says, "Train up a child in the way he should go,"—That is impossible, say many Methodist parents, for the way they should go is that of holiness, into which they can neither be led nor driven by any created power." The obvious meaning of this objection is, We are not God, and therefore cannot give our children grace; and we consequently despair of our efforts,

in order to their conversion, being successful.' What can be said in vindication of such parents? Charity would hope that invincible ignorance may be pleaded in their favour, as the importance of religious education in all its parts has never been laid before them with its proper evidence. This is a shameful and shocking defect in the Methodist economy.—Parents cannot give their children grace. Admitted; but are they therefore to neglect their duty? Because they cannot do what is impossible to a creature, are they to neglect what is commanded by their Creator? The husbandman does not suppose himself exempted from cultivating his fields, under a pretence that he cannot command the sun and rain, without which all his labours must be unproductive. If all resolved to neglect doing things practicable, because they cannot do such as are impossible, all voluntary action, if such an absurd resolution could be put in practice, must come to an end.

The truth is, deny it who may, that a proper religious education is rare in the Methodist connexion. Should this position be disputed, I am ready to produce the evidence of facts in its vindication.—What deserves the name of a religious education is, alas! little known in the world; but that it should be so little known to the Methodists, a people in general truly pious, is a matter of peculiar regret. It has never properly entered

into their economy ; and whether it will is doubtful. This lamentable defect is the grand cause that so few of the children of that people are truly religious. Not accountable to any description of ministers for their conduct, many of them, in all the foppery of dress which their stations in life can furnish, go to the Methodist chapels with as much levity and indifference to divine things as they would go to a playhouse. They do not consider themselves as properly belonging to any denomination of the visible church ; how then can they make a part of the whole ?

SECTION XVI.

THE EFFECTS OF METHODISM ON ITS ADHERENTS AS MEMBERS OF CIVIL SOCIETY.

IT is a maxim founded in truth, that righteousness exalteth a nation. Uniform good morals require good principles for their basis ; nor can they exist without such a foundation. A bad creed, and immoral life, mutually strengthen, as well as propagate each other.—If the doctrines of Methodism be scriptural and reasonable, and, when sincerely embraced, instrumental in promoting true morality ; the more such doctrines are received in any civil community, it has the less to fear from either popular rage or foreign

invasion. That public vices are private benefits, is a maxim subversive of all that deserves the name of government. On the broad ground, of the Methodists being improved in their morals, which few even of their enemies will call in question, they may be considered as an advantage, in a civil point of view, to any country in which they reside. Men of sound principles and good morals, whatever corrupt and superficial politicians may assert, make the best subjects at all times ; and are most to be depended upon in the hour of alarm and danger. A general dereliction of religious principle, especially in the higher walks of life, not excepting the clergy themselves, joined to an almost universal dissolution of manners, preceded the French Revolution. Similar causes tend in their nature to produce similar effects. The man who blasphemes God cannot be thought conscientiously to honour the king. Infidel and profligate characters, and not sober, conscientious christians are proper subjects for exciting the caution and jealousy of government.

The Quakers, a peaceable body, have long been not only protected in common with their fellow subjects, but favoured by government more than any other dissenting community. Their avowed disaffection to our religious Establishment, and their uniformly refusing to serve in the army or navy, are unpleasant peculiarities which

the Methodists have never adopted.—Nothing invidious is meant by this comparison : it was made to shew, that if the Quakers, who on account of their religious views are opposed to tythes and a military life, are judged worthy of the protection and favour of government ; the Methodists have the strongest claim to the continuance of that toleration with which they have been so long favoured. Religious toleration is an essential part of the British constitution ; which should no more be attacked with impunity than any of the three essential branches of the legislature. Protestantism, the religion of this country, is founded on the unalienable right of private judgment. Those who deny this right, in order to be consistent, must consider the Reformation as a crime, and the Reformers as rebels, as well as schismatics.—But such is the mild spirit of the British government, than even the Roman Catholics, some of whose religious tenets militate against all protestant governments, are no longer subject to penalties on account of the open profession and propagation of their religion. Nor are they merely tolerated in Ireland, an integral, and very important part of the United Kingdom, but indulged with an endowed college for the education of young men designed for priests of the Romish persuasion. Nay, so far has the legislature conceded to their requests, that most offices of honour and emolument are enjoyed by them in common with their protestant

fellow subjects. It is not my intention to wish their privileges curtailed ; but only to observe, that as they are permitted to profess and propagate their religious opinions without molestation ; the Methodists, whose doctrines are those of the established Church, should not be held up as objects of suspicion to government, nor be rendered in the smallest degree apprehensive of being deprived of any of the privileges which they have enjoyed ever since they became a people. They know little of the British government, who think it capable of granting complete toleration to papists, and persecuting dissenters of any description.

That the Methodists are a species of dissenters, but of a peculiar sort, is undeniable. Many of them regularly attend the service of the established Church still, which was the case with them *all* at the commencement of Methodism, save the *few*, who from dissenting bodies joined their society. Had they *continued* to do so, they would have been, in the eyes of several judicious observers, more worthy of general approbation. But still, their partial separation from the established Church does not in any measure affect their civil obedience, nor render them less loyal than if they had uniformly continued in its pale. As a body, they are friendly to the Church Establishment, and rejoice in its prosperity.

With respect to their political opinions, they are decidedly in favour of our own most excellent mixt government. They have never been taught the dangerous position, that subjects, in certain cases, have a right to turn their arms against their rulers. The *right of resistance* residing in the governed, and of which themselves are to judge when it should be used, though maintained by Locke and other men famed for political knowledge, is a position which, if even *theoretically* true, would, if reduced to practice, deprive all governments of stability. The mass of the people as a modern statesman observed, have nothing to do with the laws but to obey them. Government arising from the people is a chimera well suited to the views of the abettors of the new and vain philosophy. And does it not follow, that the people having a *right* to destroy governments is equally chimerical and absurd? That, when instigated by incendiaries and demagogues, they are adequate to the latter, authentic history affords many lamentable proofs; but that they have a *right* to do so can no more be proved by the event, than that robbers and murtherers have a right to act as pests of society, because their nefarious attempts are often crowned with success. The primitive christians, labouring under the most cruel persecutions, were completely passive; nor did they ever think of turning their arms against their persecuting tyrants. "Being persecuted

they suffered it" patiently.—But would the Methodists in this imitate the primitive christians? Sure I am, that their religious and political principles are in favour of such passive obedience; but happily, for the good of the world, and honour of human nature, they are in no danger of being called to endure "the fiery trial." While the British government, which providentially has acquired a great accession of strength and stability in this revolutionary age, continues unadulterated (and may it ever continue!) it neither will, nor can, give the smallest countenance to persecution.

The crowds which attend the Methodist chapels in most parts of England, when contrasted with the small congregations which in many places attend the parochial churches, give offence to some, who ignorantly confound loyalty with attendance on the Church service. To govern men in matters purely civil is no easy task; but in matters religious it is unspeakably more difficult. To *force* the people to church by civil penalties, might indeed for a time fill the Churches; but to no moral or religious purpose. Uniformity in matters ecclesiastical, enforced by fines and imprisonment, had a full trial in this country since the Reformation; but on account of the disgraceful evils with which it was accompanied, was wisely relinquished.

It is a fact no way exaggerated, that all the churches and chapels in England belonging to the Establishment would not contain within their walls more than one third of its population capable of attending divine worship. And what is to be done with the other two parts which the churches are incapable of containing? Can they, with any justice, be called churchmen who never statedly attend the Church service?—From the present fewness of Churches and Church ministers, two-thirds of the population cannot, were they inclined to it, attend the established worship. It will be answered, there are many Churches already not filled; then why erect more at present? But still what is to be done with the mass of the people? They will not attend the Church service; nor can they be sent to Church under a guard, as if conducted to prison: and if they were, we could not expect that their *forced* attendance would be followed by any good effects. Thousands of this description hear the Methodists, and, being reformed, become good members of civil and religious society. How narrow must the souls of these men be, who would rather that thousands should die without saving knowledge, than receive it by the instrumentality of ministers without the *accident* of their mode of worship and church government being established by the civil power? I say *accident*; for the immutable distinctions between right and wrong, holiness and sin, do not

change with the modifications of civil government. The Church of England was as true a Church when persecuted in the time of Cromwell, as when accompanied with the appendages of wealth and honour which it obtained at the Restoration. Nor was Dr. Hammond less a true minister of Christ, because he did not live to be promoted at that eventful aera. And surely the primitive church was not less pure, when "every where spoken against," than after it was made by Constantine the religion of the Roman empire.

Finally, on an impartial review of the effects of Methodism on civil life, the result is satisfactory. Its adherents are manifestly improved in their morals; and are of course proportionably useful to themselves and others. Their loyal principles, which make an essential part of their religious dogmas, render them loving and obedient subjects. They are taught by the highest authority, "that the powers which be are ordained of God;" nor do they attempt to qualify that declaration so as to make it mean no more than that God designed the existence of civil society. To the passive obedience of the Quakers in principle and practice, the Methodists as a body join active obedience, without the smallest scruple or reluctance. Hence several of them are found in the army and navy; and not a few filling civil offices under government. They must be strangely blinded by pre-

judice, who do not see that Methodism, by reclaiming many vicious characters, and improving the morals of thousands, has contributed to the strength and stability of the British government.

SECTION XVII.

HAVE THE METHODISTS REACHED THEIR ZENITH?—
AND IS THERE SUFFICIENT GROUND FOR BELIEVING
THAT, AS A BODY, THEY WILL LOSE THE PIETY
AND ZEAL FOR WHICH THEY HAVE LONG BEEN
JUSTLY NOTED.

IT is a false maxim, very generally adopted, that the former days were better than the present; hence some, lavish in their praise of the past, and censure of the present, confidently assert that the Methodists are a falling, if not a fallen people. The authors and patrons of this severe censure are no way remarkable for strength of intellect, or general knowledge. They are apt to confound depth of piety with rusticity of manners, and a conversation generally *confined* to the peculiar doctrines of Methodism.—But let us candidly inquire, in what did the first Methodists, preachers and people, excel the present? On many accounts, the preference will be given to their venerable Founder; and every preacher in the connexion, who had the happiness of being acquainted

with him, will be ready to say, "I ne'er shall set my eyes upon his like again." By nature and education, he was qualified for the greatest and most arduous undertakings. He was in fact the Luther of his age. In addition to all these advantages, he stood on an eminence, being at the head of a large and growing body, to which his will in general carried the force of law. Such a situation was highly favourable to the calling forth all the energies of his capacious mind. Should his equal now arise in the Methodist connexion, being differently situated, he could not possibly stand so high in the general esteem. Time, place, and circumstances, are in most cases essential to the distinguishing great men from the mass of their cotemporaries. All these conspired to shew Mr. Wesley to the greatest advantage.

But were not the first preachers, whom Mr. Wesley called his assistants and helpers, superior to the present for parts and piety?—This is a delicate question, which I shall endeavour to answer without partiality.—With respect to parts, or ministerial abilities, the first Methodist preachers were not superior to the present; nor indeed in many cases equal. And concerning their piety, as we have no line to sound the different degrees which any may possess, while the present preachers continue to adorn the doctrines which they inculcate, by a holy life and conversation, we shall do well to

leave a question so far beyond our knowledge, to the decision of Him who judgeth righteously.

The same reasoning will apply to the primitive and modern private members of the Methodist body. That it always contained individuals who did no credit to their profession is a truth that none will dispute; but that, as a body, the Methodists *have been*, and *still are*, remarkable for the purity of their morals is equally evident. Hence, without such an intimate knowledge of the lives, motives, and experience of both the primitive and modern Methodists as no sober, wellinformed man will pretend to possess; it is impossible to decide to which of them we ought to give the preference.

That the Methodists are not in general as remarkable for plainness of dress as they were formerly cannot be disputed. But little, indeed, must be the information of those who, on account of that circumstance, would infer a declension of piety.—Several people of property and genteel education make at present a part of the Methodist body; who, though they do not follow the nonsensical fashions of this dissipated, giddy, and effeminate age, yet see it prudent to avoid needless singularity. The uniformity of dress by which the Quakers have long been distinguished has not been able to preserve the primitive spirit of that

body.—In short, the Methodists notwithstanding the confidence with which some have asserted it, are neither a fallen, nor a falling people. Whether it is probable that they will, as a body, lose their zeal and piety, comes now to be considered. General theory, as well as the history of all former revivals of religion, is in favour of the position that they will. But it is far from demonstrable, though generally believed, that all bodies, religious as well as civil, contain in themselves the seeds of decay and dissolution. Or should it be allowed to hold good when applied to bodies politic, in which every separate interest may clash with that of the whole, yet it does not follow that in religion the case is similar.—In religion it is every man's highest interest to be sincere, but the pursuit of his highest interest is an accession of stability to the interest of the community; we cannot therefore, while we admit the doctrine of the divine goodness, and that of moral agency, believe that the piety of any religious body must *necessarily* decay.

Three particulars are highly favourable to the purity and continuance of Methodism. 1. The comparative poverty of its adherents in general. This obliges them to such constant industry as puts them out of the way of many dangerous snares and temptations to which the idle are exposed. The Judge of all said, "How hardly shall they

that have riches enter into the kingdom of heaven?" — "Riches, said the great and good Bishop Taylor, have great dangers to their souls, not only those that covet them, but to them that have them. For if a great personage undertakes an action passionately and upon great interest, let him manage it indiscreetly, let the whole design be unjust, let it be asked with all the malice and impotency in the world, he shall have enough to flatter him, but not enough to reprove him. He had need be a bold man that tells his patron he is going to hell. And though it be a strange kind of civility, and an evil undutifulness in friends and relatives, to suffer him to perish without reproof or medicine, rather than to seem unmannerly to a great sinner; yet it is none of their least infelicities, that their wealth and greatness shall put them into sin, and yet put them past reproof. I need not instance in the habitual intemperance of rich tables, nor the evil accidents and effects of fulness, pride and lust, wantonness and softness of disposition, huge talking and an imperious spirit, despite of religion and poor persons." 2. The manner in which the Methodists are supplied with preachers is favourable to the soundness and stability of the body. It will be admitted by all who have any acquaintance with true religion, that sincere, unaffected piety, which is always accompanied by a holy life, is an essential qualification for the gospel ministry; and that without it, knowledge, learning, and

eloquence, are of comparatively little value. The latter are good and useful, but the former, necessary.—It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for men to become itinerant preachers in the Methodist connexion without genuine piety. To become such, they have to rise by the intermediate steps of leader, exhorter, and local preacher, at any of which, a charge of immorality, or false doctrine proved against them would stop their progress. 3. The doctrines and discipline of the Methodists are highly favourable to the piety, zeal, and stability of that people. Original sin, a trinity of persons in the unity of the Godhead, the Divinity of Christ, the atonement, justification by faith, holiness of heart and life, and future rewards and punishments, are essential doctrines of Methodism; nor is any preacher permitted to remain in the connexion without believing and inculcating them.

If ever the Methodists, as a body, decline from their original zeal and purity, such a declension must arise either from the preachers losing the spirit of their mission, or their church discipline becoming so popular as to be destitute of energy and impartiality. Of the former there is at present no ground for apprehension; for such are the pure doctrines and morals which they are in the constant habit of insisting upon, and the exemplary life they are obliged to lead in order to their

continuing in office, that it is almost if not altogether impossible for any of them destitute of genuine piety to continue long in the connexion. Let these men only possess the power which they originally had, of receiving into, and expelling members from the society; and of appointing all the inferior officers of the body, and of dismissing such as are found improper—and it is highly probable that the Methodists will continue a devout, zealous, and increasing people as long as the sun and moon shall endure.

I am aware that it will be objected, if the preachers possessed the sole power of receiving and excluding members, of choosing, suspending, and dismissing leaders, they would often abuse their authority by acts of caprice and tyranny. Power, it must be confessed, wherever placed, may, and sometimes will be abused. But the question is, where is it most liable to abuse? In the hands of leaders, in general of comparatively little information and local prejudices? Or in the hands of preachers, whose general knowledge and habits of life render them abundantly less liable to deception and partiality? Beside, should the latter, through passion or prejudice, decide unjustly, the injured party may have them called to account for their conduct at the annual District-meetings and Conferences. In these assemblies, charges against the preachers from any quarter,

are duly attended to, and every degree of weight is allowed to them which they justly merit. But according to the new disorganizing plan adopted, however unjust the decisions of a Leaders'-meeting may be, the injured party has no appeal.

CONCLUSION.

HAVING cursorily mentioned, in the progress of this work, several denominations of christians, a few words to, or of some of them, may not be unnecessary, or wholly uninteresting. To the established Church I am attached by principle as well as education. I rejoice in its prosperity ; and trust it will long continue a bulwark against the most violent attacks of infidelity. The truth of what I have mentioned concerning the low state of religion in it, and the general profligacy of its members previous to the rise of Methodism, the writings of the most serious and learned of the clergy themselves fully demonstrate. Matters, however, are greatly changed for the better ; but they still admit of considerable improvement. I do not write thus, in order to conciliate the bigotted of that Church, who consider all out of its pale as guilty of heresy and schism. Burnet, Tillotson, and Usher, if yet alive, would fall under their censure. With those who arrogate infallibility to themselves it would be in vain to reason.

All moderate churchmen of sense adopt the liberal and tolerating sentiments which I have endeavoured to inculcate ; with many of which churchmen I have long lived in habits of intimacy.

On the subject of Church-livings, I shall here take the liberty of making a few remarks.—The scanty provision made for the inferior orders of the clergy, among which are found many learned, pious, and amiable men, is sufficient to excite the pity of all who possess the common feelings of humanity. An equalization of the incomes of the clergy, though it might in part remedy this evil, would be productive of others still more detrimental to the interests of religion. Ten or twenty thousand pounds a year, when in the hands of a bishop, is as likely to be used for the purposes of civilization, charity, and religion, as an equal sum in the hands of a nobleman or commoner. Were the incomes of all the bishops equally divided, each of them, at the highest calculation, would receive no more than about 3500*l.* a year. And who that considers the rank which they fill in civil life, and that their revenue is not hereditary, will consider the provision made for them in any measure extravagant?—Sacred be the livings of the dignified clergy. But for a moment let us turn our attention to the great numbers of rectors and curates, who, with their families, drag out a sorrowful life in comparative want and

obscurity. No moderately large family can now, even with good economy, live genteelly on less than 200*l.* per annum. What then must be the situation of those clergymen, who, without the half of that sum, are obliged to maintain a decent exterior? I need not tell those who roll in affluence, if they give themselves the trouble to think on the subject, to what privations these men, several of whom deserve a better fate, are subjected.—Did humanity, not to say ‘religion, pervade the hearts of the opulent of the land in general, they would, by voluntary subscription, contribute to the comfortable support of the indigent clergy. Will the legislature never take their case into serious consideration? Shall they always continue the honour and shame of their ungrateful country? Out of our growing opulence, how easy would it be to fix the minimus of every clergyman’s living at 150*l.* per annum?—Though not one of that body myself, I should rejoice, for the honour of religion and comfort of thousands, at the arrival of an event so ardently to be desired.

To the Roman Catholics I shall address a few words; for some of them may have curiosity enough to read “*Strictures on Methodism.*” Your church I consider a *true* one, but greatly corrupted. Had I lived in the days of Luther, I should, in all probability, have hesitated as much

as Melancthon did in breaking from its pale ; nor do I judge harshly concerning Erasmus for living and dying in your communion. I revere the memory of those luminaries of learning and piety of which your church can boast ; and doubt not that several of its members still are eminent for learning and piety. With your peculiar doctrines I have no concern at present.—But I shall take the liberty to observe that the state of true piety and morals among you is very deplorable. Take a view of the lives of your clergy and laity, in Italy, Spain, Germany, France, and Ireland, to mention no more places where your religion is professed ; and the most sensible and devout among you must confess that they are in general very corrupt and profligate. However peremptorily you may decide on the impossibility of being saved *out* of your church, you cannot surely imagine that, without faith and good morals, the *circumstance* of being *in it*, will ensure salvation. For in whatever speculations men may indulge, concerning matters of faith and opinion ; the only true church, and infallibility ; it is infallibly true, that “without holiness no man shall see the Lord ;” and that the true infallible Head of the Church will one day say to all the finally impenitent, “Depart from me. Ye workers of iniquity.”—Happy should I be to see the spirit that influenced Kempis, Derenty, and Pascal, generally prevalent among you : there would then be no neces-

sity to say—Read the scriptures—disseminate christian knowledge among your poor ; and do not continue the disgrace of the nineteenth century, and reproach of the christian world, for a shameful ignorance of the word of God.

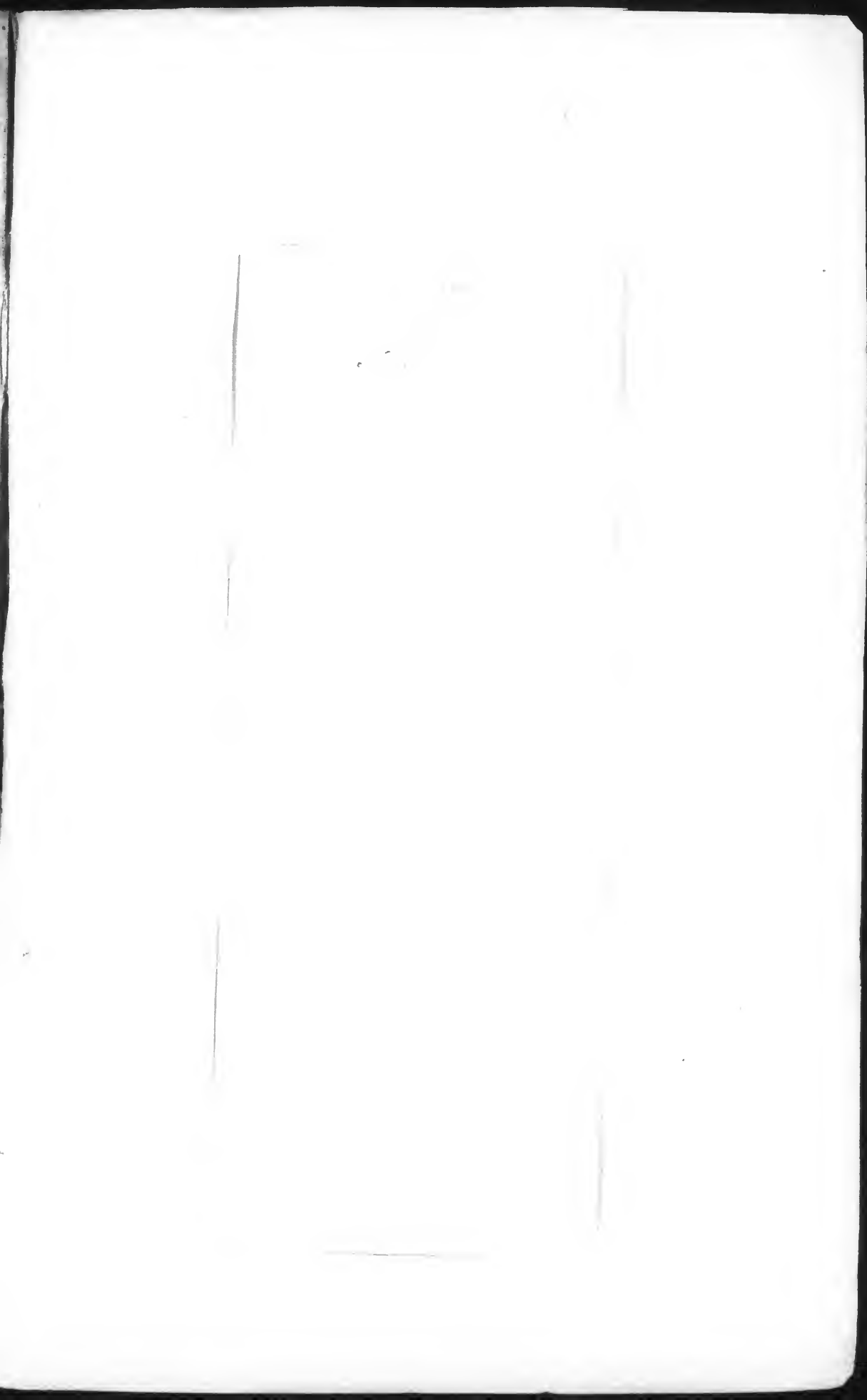
To the Quakers I would say, as a body, you are no more than the shadow of what you once were. Some among you still, I believe, live and walk in the Spirit ; but as a community you are immersed in the world, and at ease in your possessions. No longer do you suffer reproach, that lowest degree of persecution ; it follows that as a body, you do not live godly in Christ Jesus. From you the glory of reforming a number of sinners has long since departed. You are manifestly a fallen people ; may you shake yourselves from the dust, and become, for purity of heart and life, zeal, charity, and disinterestedness, a praise in the whole earth.

Having, in the course of this little work, delivered my undisguised sentiments on a variety of subjects, I may reasonably expect a degree of censure from different quarters. My attachment to the Church of England, and vindication of established Churches in general, will be offensive to some ; while my liberality to, and good opinion of, many Dissenters, will be equally offensive to others. My arguments in favour of regu-

lar Governments, and opposition to democracy, cannot fail to excite the displeasure of such of my readers as still, in spite of the evidence of facts, maintain, not the true, but absurd and chimerical rights of man.

It is the part of bigotted and uninformed readers, to condemn works in the gross which oppose any of their peculiar sentiments. Ignorant that men, eminent for parts and piety, differ on many points of a speculative nature, they make their own peculiar opinions the standard of orthodoxy. But in this reading age there are many readers of another description, who, from their acquaintance of human nature, and general knowledge, justly conclude that, in the present imperfect state of things, uniformity of opinion is impossible. These see that there is a safe and happy medium between a latitudinarian disposition on the one hand, and an uncharitable dogmatizing spirit on the other. The candid criticisms of such readers cannot fail to be acceptable to any man whose aim it is to diffuse religious truth free from the interference of party, and untainted with the nonessential dogmas of any denomination.

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